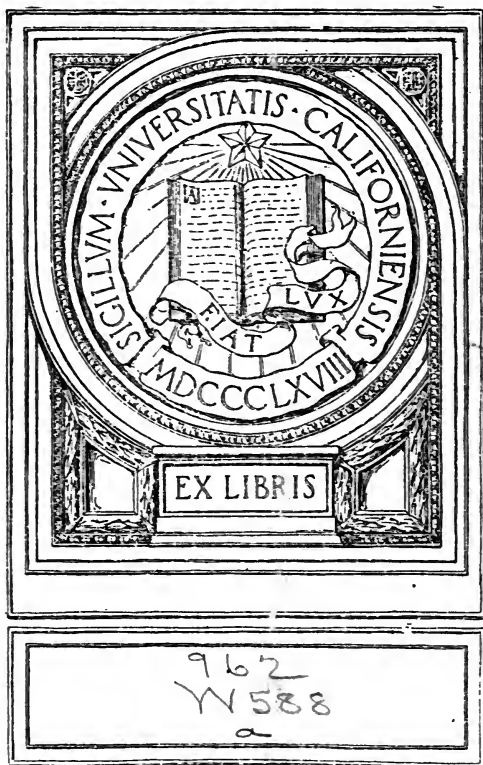


Adventures of
Bobby Orde

STEWART
EDWARD
WHITE



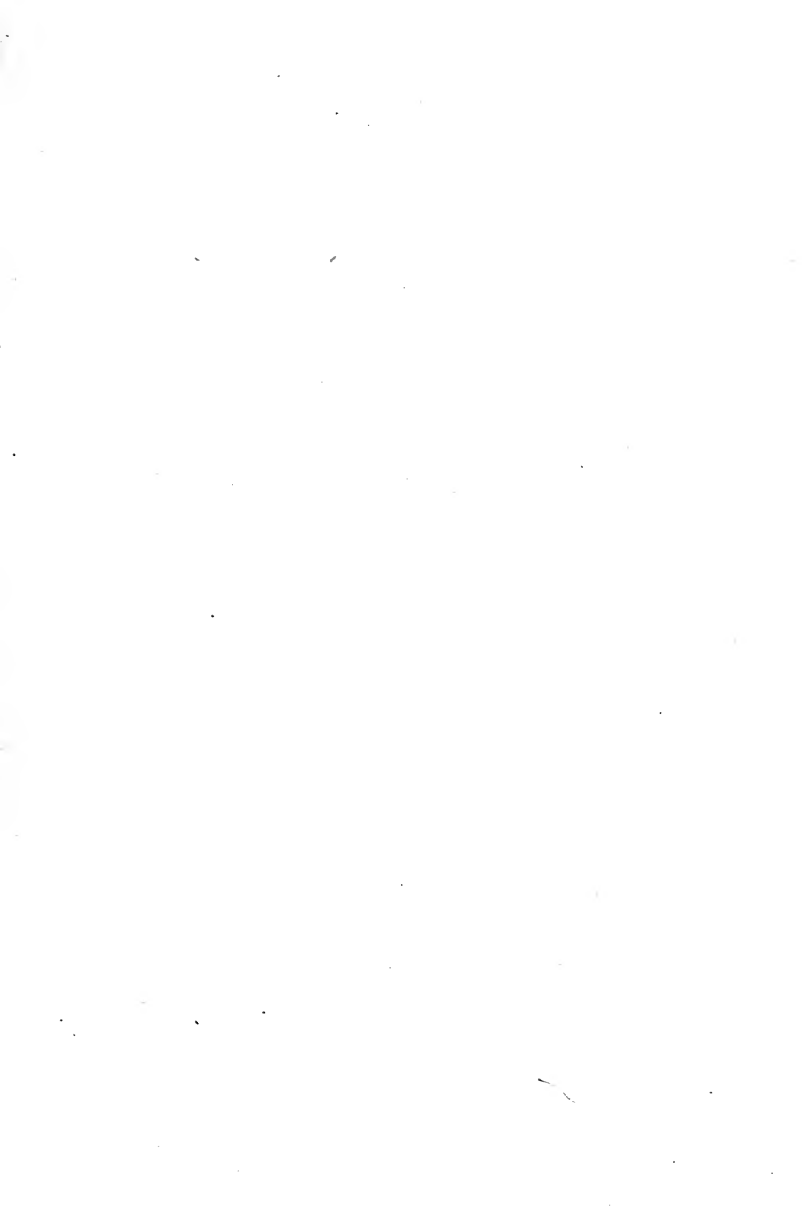
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THE ADVENTURES OF BOBBY ORDE

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THE RIVERMAN
ARIZONA NIGHTS

With Samuel Hopkins Adams
THE MYSTERY





"ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT A TRUE SPORTSMAN IN EVERY WAY IS ABOUT THE SCARCEST THING THEY MAKE—AND THE FINEST. SO NATURALLY THE COMMON RUN OF PEOPLE DON'T LIVE UP TO IT. IF *you*—NOT THE THINKING YOU, NOR EVEN THE CONSCIENCE YOU, BUT THE WAY-DOWN-DEEP-IN-YOUR-HEART *you* THAT YOU CAN'T FOOL NOR TRICK NOR LIE TO—IF THAT *you* IS SATISFIED, IT'S ALL RIGHT."

THE ADVENTURES OF BOBBY ORDE

BY
STEWART EDWARD WHITE



ILLUSTRATED BY WORTH BREHM

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THE ADVENTURES OF BOBBY ORDE



THE ADVENTURES OF BOBBY ORDE

I

THE BOOMS

At nine o'clock one morning Bobby Orde, following an agreement with his father, walked sedately to the Proper Place, where he kept his cap and coat and other belongings. The Proper Place was a small, dark closet under the angle of the stairs. He called it the Proper Place just as he called his friend Clifford Fuller, or the saw-mill town in which he lived Monrovia—because he had always heard it called so.

At the door a beautiful black and white setter solemnly joined him.

“Hullo, Duke!” greeted Bobby.

The dog swept back and forth his magnificent feather tail, and fell in behind his young master.

Bobby knew the way perfectly. You went to the fire-engine house; and then to the left after the court-house was Mr. Proctor's; and then, all at once, the town. Father's office was in the nearest square brick block. Bobby paused.

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as he always did, to look in the first store window. In it was a weapon which he knew to be a Flobert Rifle. It was something to be dreamed of, with its beautiful blued-steel octagon barrel, its gleaming gold-plated locks and its polished stock. Bobby was just under ten years old; but he could have told you all about that Flobert Rifle — its weight, the length of its barrel, the number of grains of both powder and lead loaded in its various cartridges. Among his books he possessed a catalogue that described Flobert Rifles, and also Shotguns and Revolvers. Bobby intoxicated himself with them. Twice he had even seen his father's revolver; and he knew where it was kept — on the top shelf of the closet. The very closet door gave him a thrill.

Reluctantly he tore himself away, and turned in to the straight, broad stairway that led to the offices above. The stairway, and the hall to which it mounted were dark and smelled of old coco-matting and stale tobacco. Bobby liked this smell very much. He liked, too, the echo of his footsteps as he marched down the hall to the door of his father's offices.

Within were several long, narrow desks burdened with large ledgers and flanked by

high stools. On each stool sat a clerk — five of them. An iron “base burner” stove occupied the middle of the room. Its pipe ran in suspension here and there through the upper air until it plunged unexpectedly into the wall. A capacious wood-box flanked it. Bobby was glad he did not have to fill that wood-box at a cent a time.

Against the walls at either end of the room and next the windows were two roll-top desks at which sat Mr. Orde and his partner. Two or three pivoted chairs completed the furnishings.

“Hullo, Bobby,” called Mr. Orde, who was talking earnestly to a man; “I’ll be ready in a few minutes.”

Nothing pleased Bobby more than to wander about the place with its delicious “office smell,” At one end of the room, nailed against the wall, were rows and rows of beautifully polished models of the firm’s different tugs, barges and schooners. Bobby surveyed them with both pleasure and regret. It seemed a shame that such delightful boats should have been built only in half and nailed immovably to boards. Against another wall were maps, and a real deer’s head. Everywhere hung framed photo-

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graphs of logging camps and lumbering operations. From any one of the six long windows he could see the street below, and those who passed along it. Time never hung heavy at the office.

When Mr. Orde had finished his business, he put on his hat, and the big man, the little boy and the grave, black and white setter dog walked down the long dark hall, down the steps, and around the corner to the livery stable.

Here they climbed into one of the light and graceful buggies which were at that time a source of such pride to their owners, and flashed out into the street behind Mr. Orde's celebrated team.

Duke's gravity at this juncture deserted him completely. Life now meant something besides duty. Ears back, mouth wide, body extended, he flew away. Faster and faster he ran, until he was almost out of sight; then turned with a whirl of shingle dust and came racing back. When he reached the horses he leaped vigorously from one side to the other, barking ecstatically; then set off on a long even lope along the sidewalks and across the street, investigating everything.

Mr. Orde took the slender whalebone whip from its socket.

“Come, Dick!” said he.

The team laid back their pointed delicate ears, shook their heads from side to side, snorted and settled into a swift stride. Bobby leaned over to watch the sunlight twinkle on the wheel-spokes. The narrow tires sunk slightly in the yielding shingle fragments. *Brittle! Brittle! Brittle!* the sound said to Bobby. Above all things he loved to watch the gossamer-like wheels, apparently too light and delicate to bear the weight they must carry, flying over the springy road.

At the edge of town they ran suddenly out from beneath the maple trees to find themselves at the banks of the river. A long bridge crossed it. The team clattered over the planks so fast that hardly could Bobby get time to look at the cat-tails along the bayous before blue water was beneath him.

But here Mr. Orde had to pull up. The turn-bridge was open; and Bobby to his delight was allowed to stand up in his seat and watch the wallowing, churning little tug and the three calm ships pass through. He could not see the tug at all until it had gone beyond the bridge, only its smoke; but the masts of the ship passed stately in regular succession.

“Three-masted schooner,” said he.

Then when the last mast had scarcely cleared the opening, the ponderous turn-bridge began slowly to close. Its movement was almost imperceptible, but mighty beyond Bobby’s small experience to gauge. He could make out the two bridge tenders walking around and around, pushing on the long lever that operated the mechanism. In a moment more the bridge came into alignment with a clang. The team, tossing their heads impatiently, moved forward.

On the other side of the bridge was no more town; but instead, great lumber yards, and along the river a string of mills with many smokestacks.

The road-bed at this point changed abruptly to sawdust, springy and odorous with the sweet new smell of pine that now perfumed all the air. To the left Bobby could see the shipyards and the skeleton of a vessel well under way. From it came the irregular *Block! Block! Block!* of mallets; and it swarmed with the little, black, ant-like figures of men.

Mr. Orde drove rapidly and silently between the shipyards and the rows and rows of lumber piles, arranged in streets and alleys like an untenanted city. Overhead ran tramways on

which dwelt cars and great black and bay horses. The wild exultant shriek of the circular saw rang out. White plumes of steam shot up against the intense blue of the sky. Beyond the piles of lumber Bobby could make out the topmasts of more ships, from which floated the pointed hollow "tell-tales" affected by the lake schooners of those days as pennants. At the end of the lumber piles the road turned sharp to the right. It passed in turn the small building which Bobby knew to be another delightful office, and the huge cavernous mill with its shrieks and clangs, its blazing, winking eyes beneath and its long incline up which the dripping, sullen logs crept in unending procession to their final disposition. And then came the "booms" or pens, in which the logs floated like a patterned brown carpet. Men with pike poles were working there; and even at a distance Bobby caught the dip and rise, and the flash of white water as the rivermen ran here and there over the unstable footing.

Next were more lumber yards and more mills, for five miles or so, until at last they emerged into an open, flat country, divided by the old-fashioned snake fences; dotted with blackened stumps of the long-vanished forest; eaten by

sloughs and bayous from the river. The sawdust ceased. Bobby leaned out to watch with fascinated interest the sand, divided by the tire, flowing back in a beautiful curved V to cover the wheel-rim.

As far as the eye could reach were marshes grown with wild rice and cat-tails. Occasionally one of these bayous would send an arm in to cross the road. Then Bobby was delighted, for that meant a float-bridge through the cracks of which the water spurted up in jets at each impact of the horses' hoofs. On either hand the bayou, but a plank's thickness below the level of the float-bridge, filmed with green weeds and the bright scum of water, not too stagnant, offered surprises to the watchful eye. One could see many mud-turtles floating lazily, feet outstretched in poise; and bullfrogs and little frogs; and, in the clear places, trim and self-sufficient mud hens. From the reeds at the edges flapped small green herons and thunder pumpers. And at last —

"Oh, look, papa!" cried Bobby excited and awed. "There's a snap'n' turtle!"

Indeed, there he was in plain sight, the boys' monster of the marshes, fully two feet in diameter, his rough shell streaming with long green

grasses, his wicked black eyes staring, his hooked, powerful jaws set in a grim curve. If once those jaws clamped — so said the boys — nothing could loose them but the sound of thunder, not even cutting off the head.

Ten of the twelve miles to the booms had already been passed. The horses continued to step out freely, making nothing of the light fabric they drew after them. Duke, the white of his coat soiled and muddied by frequent and grateful plunges, loped alongside, his pink tongue hanging from one corner of his mouth, and a seraphic expression on his countenance. Occasionally he rolled his eyes up at his masters in sheer enjoyment of the expedition.

“Papa,” asked Bobby suddenly, “what makes you have the booms so far away? Why don’t you have them down by the bridge?”

Mr. Orde glanced down at his son. The boy looked very little and very childish, with his freckled, dull red cheeks, his dot of a nose, and his wide gray eyes. The man was about to make some stop-gap reply. He checked himself.

“It’s this way Bobby,” he explained carefully. “The logs are cut ’way up the river — ever so far — and then they float down the river.

Now, everybody has logs in the river — Mr. Proctor and Mr. Heinzman and Mr. Welton and lots of people, and they're all mixed up together. When they get down to the mills where they are to be sawed up into boards, the logs belonging to the different owners have to be sorted out. Papa's company is paid by all the others to do the floating down stream and the sorting out. The sorting out is done in the booms; and we put the booms up stream from the mills because it is easier to float the logs, after they have been sorted, down the stream than to haul them back up the stream."

"What do you have them so far up the stream for?" asked Bobby.

"Because there's more room — the river widens out there."

Bobby said nothing for some time, and Mr. Orde confessed within himself a strong doubt as to whether or not the explanation had been understood.

"Papa," demanded Bobby, "I don't see how you tell your logs from Mr. Proctor's or Mr. Heinzman's or any of the rest of them."

Mr. Orde turned, extending his hand heartily to his astonished son.

"You're all right, Bobby!" said he. "Why,

you see, each log is stamped on the end with a mark. Mr. Proctor's mark is one thing; and Mr. Heinzman's is another; and all the rest have different ones."

"I see," said Bobby.

The road now led them through a small grove of willows. Emerging thence they found themselves in full sight of the booms.

For fifty feet Bobby allowed his eyes to run over a scene already familiar and always of the greatest attraction to him. Then came what he called, after his Malory, the Stumps Perilous. Between them there was but just room to drive — in fact the delicate points of the whiffle tree scratched the polished surfaces of them on either hand. Bobby loved to imagine them as the mighty guardians of the land beyond, and he always held his breath until they had been passed in safety.

Shying gently toward each other, ears pricked toward the two obstacles, the horses shot through with pace undiminished and drew up proudly before the smallest of the group of buildings. Thence emerged a tall, spare, keen-eyed man in slouch hat, flannel shirt, shortened trousers and spiked boots.

"Hullo, Jim," said Mr. Orde.

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"Hullo, Jack," said the other.

"Where's your chore boy to take the horses?"

"I'll rustle him," replied the River Boss.

Bobby drew a deep breath of pleasure, and looked about him.

From the land's edge extended a wide surface of logs. Near at hand little streaks of water lay between some of them, but at a short distance the prospect was brown and uniform, until far away a narrow flash of blue marked the open river. Here and there ran the confines of the various booms included in the monster main boom. These confines consisted of long heavy timbers floating on the water, and joined end to end by means of strong links. They were generally laid in pairs, and hewn on top, so that they constituted a network of floating sidewalks threading the expanse of saw-logs. At intervals they were anchored to bunches of piles driven deep, and bound at the top. An unbroken palisade of piles constituted the outer boundaries of the main boom. At the upper end of them perched a little house whence was operated the mechanism of the heavy swing boom, capable of closing entirely the river channel. Thus the logs, floating or driven down the river, encountered this obstruction;

were shunted into the main booms, where they were distributed severally into the various pocket booms; and later were released at the lower end, one lot at a time, to the river again. Thence they were appropriated by the mill to which they belonged.

Bobby did not as yet understand the mechanism of all this. He saw merely the brown logs, and the distant blue water, and the hut wherein he knew dwelt machinery and a good-natured, short, dark man with a short, dark pipe, and the criss-cross floating sidewalks, and the men with long pike poles and shorter peavies moving here and there about their work. And he liked it.

But now the chore boy appeared to take charge of the horses. Mr. Orde lifted Bobby down, and immediately walked away with the River Boss, leaving with Bobby the parting injunction not to go out on the booms.

Bobby, left to himself, climbed laboriously, one steep step at a time, to the elevation of the roofless porch before the mess house. The floor he examined, as always, with the greatest interest. The sharp caulks of the rivermen's shoes had long since picked away the surface, leaving it pockmarked and uneven. Only the

knots had resisted; and each of these now constituted a little hill above the surrounding plains. Bobby always wished that either his tin soldiers could be here or this well-ordered porch could be at home.

The sun proving hot, he peeped within the cook-house. There long tables flanked each by two benches of equal extent, stretched down the dimness. They were covered with dark oil-cloth, and at intervals on them arose irregular humps of cheese cloth. Beneath the cheese cloth, which Bobby had seen lifted, were receptacles containing the staples and condiments, such as stewed fruit, sugar, salt, pepper, catsup, molasses and the like. Innumerable tin plates and cups laid upside down were guarded by iron cutlery. It was very dark and still, and the flies buzzed.

Beyond, Bobby could hear the cook and his helpers, called cookees. He decided to visit them; but he knew better than to pass through the dining room. Until the bell rang, that was sacred from the boss himself.

Therefore he descended from the porch, one step at a time, and climbed around to the kitchen. Here he found preparations for dinner well under way.

“Llo, Bobby,” greeted the cook, a tall white-moustached lean man with bushy eyebrows. The cookees grinned, and one of them offered him a cooky as big as a pie-plate. Bobby accepted the offering, and seated himself on a cracker box.

Food was being prepared in quantities to stagger the imagination of one used only to private kitchens. Prunes stewed away in galvanized iron buckets; meat boiled in wash-boilers; coffee was made in fifty-pound lard tins; pies were baking in ranks of ten; mashed potatoes were handled by the shovelful; a barrel of flour was used every two and a half days in this camp of hungry hard-working men. It took a good man to plan and organize; and a good man Corrigan was. His meals were never late, never scant, and never wasteful. He had the record for all the camps on the river of thirty-five cents a day per man — and the men satisfied. Consequently, in his own domain he was autocrat. The dining room was sacred, the kitchen was sacred, meal hours were sacred. Each man was fed at half-past five, at twelve, and at six. No man could get a bite even of dry bread between those hours, save occasionally a teamster in the line of duty.

Bobby himself had once seen Corrigan chase a would-be forager out at the point of a carving knife. As for Bobby, he was an exception, and a favourite.

The place was enthralling, with its two stoves, each as big as the dining room table at home, its shelves and barrels of supplies, its rows of pies and loaves of bread, and all the crackle and bustle and aroma of its preparations. Time passed on wings. At length Corrigan glanced up at the square wooden clock and uttered some command to his two subordinates. The latter immediately began to dish into large receptacles of tin the hot food from the stove — boiled meat, mashed potatoes, pork and beans, boiled corn. These they placed at regular intervals down the long tables of the dining room. Bobby descended from his cracker box to watch them. Between the groups of hot dishes they distributed many plates of pie, of bread and of cake. Finally the two-gallon pots of tea and coffee, one for each end of each table, were brought in. The window coverings were drawn back. Corrigan appeared for final inspection.

“Want to ring the bell, Bobby?” he asked.

They proceeded together to the front of the

house where hung the bell cord. Bobby seized this and pulled as hard as he was able. But his weight could not bring the heavy bell over. Corrigan, smiling grimly under his white moustache, gave him advice.

"Pull on her, Bobby, hang yer feet off'n the ground. Now let up entire! Now pull again! Now let up! That's the bye! You'll get her goin' yit widout the help of any man."

Sure enough the weight of the bell did give slightly under Bobby's frantic, though now rhythmic, efforts. Nevertheless Corrigan took opportunity to reach out surreptitiously above the little boy's head to add a few pounds to the downward pull. At last the clapper reached the side.

Cling! it broke the stillness.

"There you got her goin', Bobby!" cried Corrigan, "Now all you got to do is to keep at her. Now pull! Now let go. See how much easier she goes?"

The bell, started in its orbit, was now easy enough to manipulate. Bobby was delighted at the noise he was producing, and still more delighted at its results. For from the maze of his toil he could see men coming — men from the logs near at hand, men from the booms

far away — all coming to the bell, concentrating at a common centre. By now the bell was turning entirely over. Bobby was becoming enthusiastic. He tugged and tugged. Sometimes when he did not let go the rope in time, he was lifted slightly off his feet. The sun was hot, but he had no thought of quitting. His hat fell off backward, his tousled hair wetted at the edges, clung to his forehead, his dull red cheeks grew redder behind their freckles, his eyes fairly closed in an ecstasy of enjoyment. He did not hear Corrigan laughing, nor the gleeful shouts of the men as they leaped ashore and with dripping boots advanced to the expected meal. All he knew was that wonderful *clang! clang! clang!* over him; the only thought in his little head was that he, *he*, Bobby Orde, was making all this noise himself!

How long he would have continued before giving out entirely it would be hard to say, but at this moment Mr. Orde and Jim Denning came around the corner with some haste. Both looked worried and a little angry until they caught sight of the small bell-ringer. Then they too laughed with the men.

But Mr. Orde swooped down on his son and tossed him on his shoulder.

"That'll do," he advised, "we're all here. Lord, Corrigan! I thought you were afire at least."

"You got to show us up a reg'lar Christmas dinner to match that," said one of the men to Corrigan.

After the meal, which Bobby enjoyed thoroughly, because it was so different from what he had at home, he had a request to proffer.

"Papa," he demanded, "I want to go out on the booms."

"Haven't time to-day, Bobby," replied Mr. Orde. "You just play around."

But Jim Denning would not have this.

"Can't start 'em in too early, Jack," said he. "I bet you'd been fished out from running logs before you were half his age."

Mr. Orde laughed.

"Right you are, Jim, but we were raised different in those days."

"Well," said Denning, "work's slack. I'll let one of the men take him."

At the moment a youth of not more than fifteen years of age was passing from the cook house to the booms. He had the slenderness of his years. but was toughly knit, and already possessed in eye and mouth the steady unwaver-

ing determination that the river life develops. In all details of equipment he was a riverman complete: the narrow-brimmed black felt hat, pushed back from a tangle of curls; the flannel shirt crossed by the broad bands of the suspenders; the kersey trousers "stagged" off a little below the knee; the heavy knit socks; and the strong shoes armed with thin half-inch, needle-sharp caulks.

"Jimmy Powers!" called the River Boss after this boy, "Come here!"

The youth approached, grinning cheerfully.

"I want you to take Bobby out on the booms," commanded Denning, "and be careful he don't fall in."

The older men moved away. Bobby and Jimmy Powers looked a little bashfully at each other, and then turned to where the first hewn logs gave access to the booms.

"Ever been out on 'em afore?" asked Jimmy Powers.

"Yes" replied Bobby; then after a pause, "I been out to the swing with Papa."

They walked out on the floating booms, which tipped and dipped ever so slightly under their weight. Bobby caught himself with a little stagger, although his footing was a good

three feet in width. On either side of him nuzzled the great logs, like patient beasts, and between them were narrow strips of water, the colour of steel that has just cooled.

"How deep is it here?" asked Bobby.

"'Bout six feet," replied Jimmy Powers.

They passed an intersection, and came to an empty enclosure over which the water stretched like a blue sheet. Bobby looked back. Already the shore seemed far away. Through the interstices between the piles the wavelets went *lap, lap, slap, lap!* Beyond were men working the reluctant logs down toward the lower end of the booms. Some jabbed the pike poles in and then walked forward along the boom logs. Others ran quickly over the logs themselves until they had gained timbers large enough to sustain their weight, whence they were able to work with greater advantage. The supporting log rolled and dipped under the burden of the man pushing mightily against his implement; but always the riverman trod it, first one way, then the other, in entire unconsciousness of the fact that he was doing so. The dark flanks of the log heaved dripping from the river, and rolled silently back again, picked by the long sharp caulks of the riverman's boots.

"Can you walk on the logs?" asked Bobby of his companion.

"Sure," laughed Jimmy Powers.

"Lets see you," insisted Bobby.

Jimmy Powers leaped lightly from the boom to the nearest log. It was a small one, and at once dipped below the surface. If the boy had attempted to stand on it even a second he would have fallen in. But all Jimmy Powers needed was a foothold from which to spring. Hardly had the little timber dipped before he had jumped to the next and the next after. Behind him the logs, bobbing up and down, churned the water white. Jimmy moved rapidly across the enclosure on an irregular zigzag. The smaller logs he passed over as quickly as possible; on the larger he paused appreciably. Bobby was interested to see how he left behind him a wake of motion on what had possessed the appearance of rigid immobility. The little logs bobbed furiously; the larger bowed in more stately fashion and rolled slowly in dignified protest. In a moment Jimmy was back again, grinning at Bobby's admiration.

"Look here," said he.

He took his station sideways on a log of about twenty inches diameter, and began to roll it

beneath him by walking rapidly forward. As the timber gained its momentum, the boy increased his pace, until finally his feet were fairly twinkling beneath him, and the side of the log rising from the river was a blur of white water. Then suddenly with two quick strong stamps of his caulked feet the young riverman brought the whirling timber to a standstill.

"That's birling a log," said he to Bobby.

They walked out on the main boom still farther. The smaller partitions between the various enclosures were often nothing but single round poles chained together at their ends. On these Bobby was not allowed to venture.

"How deep is it here?" he asked again.

"'Bout thirty feet," replied Jimmy Powers.

Bobby for an instant felt a little dizzy, as though he were on a high building. All this fabric on which he moved suddenly seemed to him unreal, like a vast cobweb in suspension through a void. It was a brief sensation, and little defined in his childish mind, so it soon passed, but it constituted while it lasted a definite subjective experience which Bobby would always remember. As he looked back, the buildings of the river camp, lying low among the trees, had receded to a great distance;

apparently at another horizon was the dark row of piling that marked the outer confines of the booms; up and down stream, as far as he could see, were the logs. Bobby suddenly felt very much alone, with the blue sky above him, and the deep black water beneath, and about him nothing but the quiet sullen monsters herded from the wilderness. He gripped very tightly Jimmy Powers's hand as they walked along.

But shortly they turned to the left; and after a brief walk, mounted the rickety steps to the floor of the hut where dwelt old man North, and the winch for operating the swinging boom. Old man North was short, dark, heavy and bearded; he smoked perpetually a small black clay pipe which he always held upside down in his mouth. His conversation was not extensive; but his black eyes twinkled at Bobby, so the little boy was not afraid of him. When he saw the two approaching, he reached over in the corner and handed out a hickory pole peeled to a beautiful white.

"The wums is yonder," said he.

Bobby put a fat worm on his hook and sat down in the opposite doorway where he could dangle his feet directly over the river. Where

the shadow of the cabin fell, he could see far down in the water, which there became a transparent fair green. Close to the piles, on the tops of which the hut was built, were various fish. Jimmy leaned over.

"Mostly suckers," he advised. "Yan's a perch, try him."

Bobby cautiously lowered his baited hook until it dangled before the perch's nose. The latter paid absolutely no attention to it. Bobby jiggled it up and down. No results. At last he fairly plumped the worm on top of the fish's nose. The perch, with an air of annoyance, spread his gills and, with the least perceptible movement of his tail, sank slowly until he faded from sight.

"Better let down your hook and fish near bottom," suggested Jimmy Powers.

Bobby did so. The peace of warm afternoon settled upon him. He dangled his chubby legs, and tried to spit as scientifically as he could, and watched the waving green current slip silently beneath his feet. Beside him sat Jimmy Powers. The fragrant strong tobacco smoke from North's pipe passed them in wisps.

"I'd like to walk on logs," proffered Bobby at last, "It looks like lots of fun."

"Oh, that's nothin'," said Jimmy Powers, "You ought to be on drive."

The boys fell into conversation. Jimmy told of the drive, and the log-running. Bobby listened with the envy of one whose imagination cannot conceive of himself permitted in such affairs. He was entirely absorbed. And then all at once the peace was shattered.

"Yank him, Bobby, yank him!" yelled Jimmy.

"Christmas! he's a whale!" said old North.

For, without wavering, the tip of the hickory pole had been ruthlessly jerked below the water's surface, and the butt nearly pulled from Bobby's hands.

Bobby knew the proper thing to do. In such cases you heaved strongly. The fish flew from the water, described an arc over your head, and lit somewhere behind you. He tried to accomplish this, but his utmost strength could but just lift the wriggling, jerking end of the pole from the water.

"Give her to me!" cried Jimmy Powers.

"Le' me 'lone," grunted Bobby.

He planted the butt of the pole in the pit of his stomach, and lifted as hard as ever he could with both hands. His face grew red, his ears

rang, but, after a first immovable resistance, to his great joy the tip of the bending, wriggling pole began to give. Slowly, little by little, he pulled up the fish, until he could make out the flash of its body darting to and fro far down in the depths.

"Black bass!" murmured Jimmy Powers breathlessly.

And then just as his size and beauty were becoming clearly visible, the line came up with a sickening ease. The interested spectators caught a glimpse of white as the fish turned.

Bobby let out a howl of disappointment.

"Oh gee, that's hard luck!" cried Jimmy Powers,

"Bet he weighed four pounds," proffered North curtly.

But at this instant a faint clear whistle sounded from about the wooded bend of the river above.

"Boat coming," said North, "Clear out of the way, boys."

He began at once to operate the winch which drew the long slanting swing boom out of the channel, for the River was navigable water, and must not be obstructed. In a moment appeared the *Lucy Belle*, a shallow-draught,

flimsy-looking double decker, with two slim smokestacks side by side connected by a band of fancy grill-work, a walking beam, two huge paddle boxes and much white paint. She sheered sidewise with the current around the bend, and headed down upon them accompanied by a vast beating of paddle wheels. Bobby could soon make out atop the walking-beam, the swaying iron Indian with bent bow, and the piles of slabs which constituted the *Lucy Belle's* fuel. Almost immediately she was passing, within ten feet or so of the hut. The water boiled and eddied among the piles, rushing in and sucking back. A fat, ruddy-faced man in official cap and citizen's clothes leaned over the rail.

"Well, you made her to-day," shouted North.

"Bet ye," called the man with a grin. "Only aground once."

The *Lucy Belle* swept away with an air of pride. She made the trip to and from Redding, forty miles up the River, twice a week. Sometimes she came through in a day. Oftener she ran aground.

Now Bobby reverted to his original idea.

"I'd like to walk on the logs," said he.

"Well, come on, then," said Jimmy Powers.

They retraced their steps along the booms until near the shore.

"You don't want to try her where she's deep," explained Jimmy Powers, "'Cause then if you should fall in, the logs would close right together over your head, and then where'd you be?"

Bobby shuddered at this idea, which in the event continued to haunt him for some days.

"There's a big one," said Jimmy Powers. "Try her."

Bobby stepped out on a big solid-looking log, which immediately proved to be not solid at all. It dipped one way, Bobby tried to tread the other. The log promptly followed his suggestion — too promptly. Bobby soon found himself about two moves behind in this strange new game. He lost his balance, and the first thing he knew, he found himself waist deep in the water.

Jimmy Powers laughed heartily; but to Bobby this was no laughing matter. The penalties attached both by nature and his mother were dire in the extreme. He foresaw sickness and spankings, both of which had been promised him in the event of wet feet merely, and here he was dripping from the waist down! In any other surroundings or with any other company he would have wept bitterly. Even in the

presence of Jimmy Powers his lower lip quivered; and his soul filled to the very throat with dismay. Jimmy Powers could not understand his very evident perturbation. If took a great deal of explanation on Bobby's part; but finally there was conveyed to the young riverman's understanding a slight notion of the situation. To the child the day seemed lost; but Jimmy Powers was more resourceful. He surveyed his charge thoughtfully.

"You're all right, kid," he announced at last. "Your collar's all right, and your hair ain't wet. The rest'll dry out so nobody will know the diff'."

Bobby brightened.

"Won't I catch cold?" he asked doubtfully.

"This kind of weather? Naw!" said Jimmy Powers with scorn. "You rustle in to the cook shanty and get Corrigan to let you sit by the stove."

Bobby said farewell to his guide, and presented himself to the cook.

"I fell in," he announced, "can I sit by the stove?"

"Sure" said Corrigan hospitably. "Take a cracker-box and go over by the wood box. Tryin' to ride a log?"

"Yes" confessed Bobby.

"Well, you want to look out for them," warned Corrigan a little vaguely. He produced the customary cookey. Bobby sat and steamed, and manched and told about the fish he had almost caught. He liked Corrigan because the latter talked to him sensibly, without ill-timed facetiousness, as to an equal. In a moment Duke thrust his muzzle in the door. Bobby looked hastily down. His clothes were quite dry.

"Don't tell Papa," he begged.

For answer Corrigan portentously winked one eye, and went on peeling potatoes. After a moment Mr. Orde appeared at the door.

"Bobby here?" he inquired. "Oh yes! Come on, youngster."

Bobby showed himself with considerable trepidation; but apparently Mr. Orde noticed nothing wrong, and the little boy's spirits rose. The team was waiting, and they mounted the buggy at once. Duke fell in behind them soberly. For him the freshness of the expedition was over. It was now merely a case of get back home.

"Have a good time?" asked Mr. Orde.

Bobby talked busily all the way in. He told principally of the fish, although the *Lucy Belle*

and Jimmy Powers came in for a share. From time to time Mr. Orde said, "That's good," or, "Yes," which sufficed Bobby. Probably, however, the man heard little of his son's talk. His mind was very busy with the elements of the game he was playing, sorting and arranging them, figuring how to earn and borrow the money necessary to permit his taking advantage of a chance he thought he saw in the western timber lands. He heard little, to be sure, and yet he was in reality wholly occupied with the child prattling away at his side — with his fortune, and his business prospects of thirty years hence.

Under the maples the sun slanted low and golden and mote-laden. Bobby suddenly felt a little tired, and more than a little hungry. He descended from the buggy with alacrity. The wetting was forgotten in the home-coming. Only when washing for dinner did he remember with certain self-felicitation that even his mother had noticed nothing. For the first time it occurred to him that his parents were not omniscient:—that was the evil of the afternoon's experiences. For the first time also it occurred to him that he possessed the ability to meet an emergency without their aid:—that was the

good of it. And the good far outweighed the evil.

That night Bobby called upon the Lord to bless those dear to him, as usual; but he offered on his own account an addendum.

“And make Bobby grow up a big man like Jimmy Powers.”

II

THE PICNIC

One Saturday, shortly after, everybody was early afoot in preparation for a picnic up the River. Bobby had on clean starched brown linen things, and his hair was parted on one side and very smoothly brushed across his forehead. His mother had been somewhat inclined to the dark green velvet suit with the lace collar, but to his great relief his father had intervened.

"Give the boy a chance," said he, "He'll want to eat peaches and go down in the engine room, and perhaps catch sunfish."

At the wharf, built along the front of the river at the foot of Main Street, they could see, when they turned the corner at the engine-house, the single sturdy stack of the *Robert O* pouring forth a cloud of gray smoke, while in front of it fluttered the white of the women's dresses.

"We're going to be late," danced Bobby.

"I guess they'll wait for us," replied Mr. Orde easily. "They know what's in this," he smiled, patting the hamper he was carrying.

At the wharf they were greeted by a chorus of exclamations from a large group of people. Mr. and Mrs. Taylor were there, the latter sweet and dainty in one of the very latest creations in muslin; Mr. and Mrs. Fuller with Tad and Clifford; young Mr. Carlin from the bank; Mr. and Mrs. Proctor, and their young-lady daughter wearing a marvellous "waterfall"; Angus McMullen, alone, his father detained professionally; Mrs. Cathcart and Georgie; young Bradford carrying his banjo, his wonderful raiment and his air of vast leisure; Welton, the lumberman, red-faced, jolly, popular and ungrammatical. The women guarded baskets. All greeted the Ordes with various degrees of hilarity. When the noise had died down, a massive and impressive lady, heretofore unnamed, stepped forward. She held a jewelled arm straight before her, the hand drooping slightly, so that, although she was in reality of but medium stature, she gave the impression of condescending from a height.

"Good morning, Mrs. Owen," greeted Mrs. Orde, shaking the proffered hand.

“Good morning, my dear,” replied Mrs. Owen regally. She swept slowly sideways to reveal a woman and a little girl of seven or eight years, immediately behind her. “Allow me to present to you my very dear friend, Mrs. Carleton. Mrs. Carleton is from the city, staying at the Ottawa for a few weeks, and I knew you would like the chance to show her some of our beautiful River.” Mrs. Carleton, a pretty, modish woman, with the ease of city manner, bowed quietly and murmured her pleasure. The little girl looked half bashfully through a wealth of natural curls at the grown-ups to whom she was presented in the off-hand method one employs with children. She was altogether a charming little girl. Her hair was of the colour of ripe wheat; her skin was of the light smooth brown peculiar to an exceptional blonde complexion tanned in the sun; her mouth was full and whimsical; and her eyes, strangely enough in one otherwise so light, were so black as to resemble spots. Her dress was very simple, very starched, very white. A big leghorn hat with red roses half hid her head. She was shy, that was easily to be seen; but shyness was relieved from the awkwardness so usual and so painful in children of her age by

the results of what must have been a careful training. She answered when she was spoken to, directly and to the point; and yet it could not but be evident that her spirit fluttered.

The combination was charming; and Mrs. Orde fell to it at once.

"Celia, my dear," she said kindly, "come with me, we're going to have a nice day together; and I have a little boy named Bobby who will show you everything."

But now the *Robert O* gave two impatient toots. Everybody ceased greeting everybody else, and began to pile the shawls and lunch baskets aboard. The thick strong gunwale of the *Robert O* was a foot or so below the chute level from the wharf. The women were helped aboard soberly by the men. Miss Proctor, however, slipped little slips and screamed little screams, while young Mr. Carlin, Bradford and Welton, with galvanized beaming smiles, all attempted to help her. Mrs. Owen marched down the chute, waited calmly and without impatience until all the available men were at hand, and then stepped down majestically with dignity unimpaired.

Long before this, Bobby had quit the altogether uninteresting wharf. The *Robert O* he

had seen many times from a distance, and once of twice near at hand lying at the cribs and piers, but this was his first chance to explore. Accordingly he dropped down to her deck, and, with the natural instinct to see as far ahead as possible, marched immediately to the very prow. The deck proved to slope up-hill strangely, which, in its unlikeness to any floor Bobby had ever walked on, was in itself a pleasure. The hawser around the bitt interested him; and the glimpse he had of the sparkling river slipping toward him from the yellow hills up stream. He could just rest his chin on the rail to look.

Then he turned his gaze aft; and encountered the amused scrutiny of a man leaning on a wheel in a little house. The house had big windows, and on top was an iron eagle with spread wings. Two steps led up to a door on each side; and Bobby without hesitation entered one of these doors.

The inside of the house he found different from any house he had ever been in before; and possessed of a strange fascination. There was the wheel, with projecting handles to every spoke, and above it, racks containing spy-glasses, black pipes, tobacco-tins. At hand

projected a speaking-tube like that in the back hall at home, and two or three handles connected with wires. Behind the wheel was a broad leather seat; and clothes on nails; and a chart; and a pilot's licence, of which Bobby understood nothing, but admired the round gold seals.

"Well, Bobby, what do you think of it?" asked the man.

Bobby had not had time to look at the man. He did so now and liked him. The first thing he noticed was the man's eyes, which were steady and unwavering and as blue as the sky. Then he surveyed in turn gravely his heavy bleached, flaxen moustache; his hard brown cheeks; the round barrel of his blue-clad body; and his short sturdy legs.

"Think you'd like to run a tug?" inquired this man.

"I don't know," replied Bobby; "what is your name?"

"I'm Captain Marsh," replied the man. He glanced out the open door at the group on the wharf. "If they're going up past the bend to-day, they'll have to get a move," he remarked. "Here, Bobby, want to blow the whistle?"

He lifted the boy up in the hollow of one

arm. "There, that's it; that handle. Pull down on it, and let go."

Bobby did so and his little heart almost stopped at the shock of the blast, so loud was it, and so near.

"Now again," commanded Captain Marsh.

Bobby recovered and obeyed. The passengers began to embark.

Captain Marsh watched until the last was safely aboard; then he set Bobby gently to the floor.

"If you want to see out, go sit on the bunk back there," he advised.

Somebody cast off the lines. Captain Marsh pulled the other handle. A sharp tinkling bell struck somewhere far in the depths of the craft. Immediately Bobby felt beneath him the upheaval and trembling of some mighty force. The wharf seemed to slip back. In another moment at a second tinkle of the bell the tug had gathered headway, and the little boy was watching with delight the sandhills and buildings on one side and the other slipping by in regular succession.

Captain Marsh stood easily staring directly ahead of him, and paying no more attention to the child. Bobby sat very straight in his

absorption. New impressions were coming to him so fast that he had no desire to move. The slow turn of the great wheel; the throb of the engine; the swift passing of water; the orderly procession of the river banks; the feeling of smooth, resistless motion—these sufficed. How long he might have sat there if undisturbed, it would be hard to say; but at the end of a few moments Angus McMullen looked in at the door.

“What you stayin’ here for, Bobby?” he inquired with contemptuous wonder. “Come on out and see the big waves we’re making.”

Outside Bobby found all the grown-ups gathered forward of the pilot house. The older people were seated on folding camp chairs, the equilibrium of which they found some difficulty in maintaining on the sloping deck. Bradford, Carlin, Welton and Miss Proctor, however, had established themselves in the extreme bow. Miss Proctor perched on the bitts, while the men stood or leaned near at hand. Occasionally, as the tug changed course, Miss Proctor would utter a little exclamation and thrust her arms out aimlessly, as though uncertain. All three of the men thereupon assured her balance for her. With the group Bobby saw the little girl with light hair.

"Not up there," advised Angus. "This way." A very narrow passage ran between the thick gunwale and the deck-house. It sloped down and then gradually up toward the stern. At its lowest point it seemed to Bobby fearfully near the river; and as he descended to that point he discovered that indeed the displacement of rapid running appeared to force the water even above the level of the deck. Bits of chip, sawdust and the like shot swiftly by in the smooth, oily curve of the liquid. The wet smell of it came to Bobby's eager nostrils, the subtle cool aroma of the river.

But, from a little door level with the deck, smoking a pipe, leaned a negro who greeted them jovially. He dwelt in a narrow place down in the hull, filled with machinery and the glow of a furnace. The boys hung in the opening fascinated by the regular rise and fall of the polished rods; savouring the feel of heavy heated air and the clean smell of oil. In a moment the negro flung open an iron door whence immediately sprang glowing light and a blast of heat. Into this door he thrust two or three long slabs which he took from the deck on the other side of the tug; and shut it to with a clang.

After gazing their fill, the boys continued their way back. The deck-house ended. They found themselves on the broad, flat, spoon-shaped after-deck occupied by the strong towing-bitts and coils of cable.

“Isn’t this great?” asked Angus.

They joined the Fuller boys hanging eagerly over the stern. Here the wake boiled white and full of bubbles from the action of the powerful propeller necessary to a towing-tug. Along the edges it was light green shot with blue; and the central line of its down-section waved from side to side like a snake. On either side long, slanting waves pushed aside by the bow surged smoothly away; behind followed other round waves in regular and diminishing succession. Over them the chips and bark rode with a jolly, dancing motion.

Shortly, however, the younger people discovered the possibilities of the after-deck. Miss Proctor leaned her back against the low gunwale astern. The men disposed themselves about her. They talked with a great deal of laughter; but Bobby did not find their conversation amusing. Finally they began to entreat Mr. Bradford to play his banjo. That young gentleman became suddenly afflicted with shyness.

"I don't play much," he objected. "Honestly I don't — just picked up a few chords by ear."

"Oh, Mr. *Bradford*," cried Miss Proctor, "I've heard you play *beautifully*. Do get it."

Mr. Bradford objected further; and was further cajoled by Miss Proctor. Bobby wondered why he had brought the banjo along, if he didn't want to play on it. The other men did none of the persuading. Finally Mr. Bradford procured the instrument. He took some time to tune it; and had something to say concerning damp air and the strings. Finally he played the "Spanish Fandango," to the enthusiasm of Miss Proctor and the polite attention of the other men. This he followed by a song called "Listen to the Mocking Bird," the chorus to which consisted of complicated gurgling whistling supposed to represent the song of the mocking bird, though it is to be doubted if that performer would have recognized himself in it. Miss Proctor approving of this, Bradford next played a trick piece, in the course of which he did acrobatics with his instrument, but without missing a note.

Carlin and Welton finally strolled away unnoticed. The lumberman offered the other a cigar.

"Ain't no use buckin' the funny man with the banjo, Tommy," he observed with a rueful grin.

Mr. Bradford now put two pennies under the bridge.

"Makes it sound like a guitar," he explained; and drifted into thrillingly sentimental selections. He sang three in so low a voice that Bobby began to think it useless to listen any more; when a loud and prolonged whistle from the tug drowned all other sounds. Mr. Bradford looked savage; but the boys were delighted.

"Going to pass the drawbridge!" shrieked Angus.

They raced away to the bow in order to watch the imminence of the great structure over their heads; to see the smokestack dip back on its hinges as they passed beneath; and to gloat over the smash of their waves against the piling of the bridge's foundation. Here Bobby was captured by Mrs. Orde.

"Here, Bobby," said she, "This is Celia Carleton, and I want you to be nice to her."

With that she left them staring at each other.

"How do you do?" remarked Bobby gravely.

"How do you do?" said she.

They were no further along.

"I got a new knife," blurted out Bobby, in desperation.

"That's nice," said Celia politely. "Let's see it."

"I haven't got it with me," confessed Bobby. He was ashamed to say that he was not yet permitted to use it.

He glanced at her sideways. Somehow he liked the fresh clean stiffness of her starched skirts, and the biscuit brown of her complexion. He desired all at once that she think well of him.

"I can jump off our high-board fence to the ground," he boasted.

Celia seemed impressed.

"My knife's nothing," said Bobby, "My father's got a razor that can cut anything. He lets me take it whenever I want it. It's awful sharp. If I had it here I could cut this boat right in two with it."

"My!" said Celia, "But I wouldn't want to cut it in two. Would you?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Bobby, his legs apart, his head on one side. He was sure now that he liked this new acquaintance; she seemed pleasantly to be awestricken. "Come on, let's go in the back part of the boat" he suggested, "and I'll show you things."

"All right," said she.

Bobby led her past the scornful Angus to the narrow deck.

"This is the engine room," he announced out of his new knowledge.

But Celia did not care for it.

"It's awfully dirty," said she.

This was a new point of view; and Bobby marvelled. However, she was delighted with the after-deck, and the wake, and the attendant waves. Bobby showed them off to her as though they had been his private possessions. This was the first little girl he had ever known. The novelty appealed to him; the daintiness of her; the freshness and cleanness; the dependence of her on Bobby's ten years of experience — all this brought out the latent and instinctive male admiration of the child. He remained heedless of the other three boys hanging awkwardly in the middle distance. All his small store of knowledge he poured out before her — he told her everything, without reservation — of Duke, and the sand-hills, and the fort, and Sir Thomas Malory, and the booms, and the Flobert Rifle, and the "Dutchmen" on the side street. She found it all interesting. They became very good friends.

In the meantime Mr. Bradford had long since laid aside the banjo, and was basking in Miss Proctor's unshared attention. The pleased smile never left his face; the lean of his head bespoke deep deference; the curve of his body respectful devotion. He talked in a low voice, and every moment or so Miss Proctor would giggle, or exclaim, "Oh, Mr. *Bradford!*" in a pleased and reproving voice.

In the meantime the tug was going rapidly up river; and yet, with the exception of an occasional glance from some isolated individual, and the sporadic attention of the boys, no one saw what was passing. All were absorbed by the people, the little happenings and the talk aboard the craft. So without comment they swept past the tall yellow sand-hills with their fringe of crested trees on the left; and the wide plain on the right. Only Bobby remarked the deep bayou in the bosom of the hills where dreamed in the peace and mystery of an honourable old age the hulks of a dozen vessels rotting in the sun. The shipyards and the mills the other side the drawbridge nobody saw, for at that time even Bobby was absorbed in his new acquaintance.

But beyond that, the boy having offered and the girl received the first burst of confidence, the children turned their attention to things passing. They saw the wide marshes of rushes and cat-tails, with their bayous and channels wherein swam the white-billed mud-hens; and the long booms to the left filled with brown logs. From this level, low to the water, these things seemed to them wonderful and vast. After a little the *Robert O* whistled again. They passed the swing at the upper end of the booms. Old man North stood, in the doorway of his hut, smoking his short black pipe upside down. Bobby was astonished to see how different the hut looked from this point of view. He would hardly have recognized it were it not for the swing-tender, who waved his pipe at Bobby when the tug passed.

"I know him," said Bobby proudly to Celia.

The *Robert O* swept through, and the long slanting waves, and the round following waves sucked up and down among the piles.

"Now we're going around the Bend!" cried Bobby excitedly. "I never been around the Bend!"

But Celia suddenly arose.

"I'm going back to mamma and the rest," she announced.

"Why?" asked Bobby astonished. "Come on; stay here and see what there is around the Bend."

Celia stood on one foot, her black eyes wide and speculative, staring past Bobby into some fair realm of feminine caprice. She shook her head, slowly, so that first a curl on one side, then on the other fell across her eyes. After a long deliberate moment she turned and went forward, followed at a distance by the grieved and puzzled Bobby. In the bow she sidled up to her mother, against whom she leaned lightly, her head on one side, her eyes dreamy, her hand slipped into one of her mother's open palms. Bobby, shut out, made his way to the prow, where he rested his chin on the rail, and rather glumly contemplated the surprises of "around the Bend."

But over the prow the little boy was the first — except for Captain Marsh — to see from afar the landing, first as a glimmering shadow under the reflection of the elms; then as a vague ill-defined form above the River's glassy surface; finally as a wide, low, T-shaped platform wharf, reaching its twenty feet from the grassy

banks to shimmer in the heat above its own wavering reflection.

The tug sidled alongside with a great turmoil of white-and-green bubble-shot water drifting around in eddies from her labouring propeller. Captain Marsh, after one prolonged jingle of his bell emerged from his pilot-house, seized a heavy rope, and sprang ashore. The end of the rope he cast around a snubbing-pile.

But some inset of current or excess of momentum made it impossible to hold her. The rope creaked and cried as it was dragged around the smooth snubbing-pile. Finally the end was drawn so close that Captain Marsh was in danger of jamming his hands. At once, with inconceivable dexterity and quickness, he cast loose, ran forward, wrapped the line three times around another pile farther on, and braced his short, sturdy legs against the post for a trial of strength. Here the heavy, slow surge of the tug was effectually checked. Captain Marsh turned his wide grin of triumph toward his passengers. Everybody laughed, and prepared to disembark.

Between the gunwale and the wharf's edge could be seen a narrow glinting strip of very black water. The *Robert O* slowly approached

and receded from the dock; and this strip of water correspondingly widened and narrowed. Over it every one must step; and the anxieties and precautions were something tremendous. Bobby came toward the last, and was lifted bodily across, his sturdy legs curling up under like a crab's.

The wharf he found broad and square and shady, with a narrow way leading ashore. In the middle of it were piled, awaiting shipment on the *Lucy Belle*, three tiers of the old-fashioned, open-built, pail-shaped peach-baskets containing the famous Michigan fruit. Each was filled to a gentle curve above the brim, and over the top was wired pink mosquito netting. This at once protected the fruit from insects; added to the brilliancy and softness of its colouring; and lent to the rows of baskets a gay and holiday appearance. The men examined them attentively, talking of "cling stones," "free stones," "Crawfords," and other technicalities which Bobby could not understand. When the last lunch basket had been passed ashore, all crossed to the bank of the river and the grove of elms, leaving the *Robert O* and Captain Marsh and the engineer.

In the grove the boys immediately scattered

in search of adventure. All but Bobby. He remained with the older people, wishing mightily to take Celia with him; but suddenly afraid to approach her with the direct request. So he contented himself with expressive gestures, which she, close to her mother, chose to ignore.

Two of the men disappeared up the path, one carrying an empty pail. The others went busily about collecting wood, building a fire, smoothing out a place to spread the rugs which would serve as a table. All the women fluttered about the lunch baskets examining the contents, discussing them, finally distributing them in accordance with the mysterious system considered proper in such matters. Bobby, left alone, without occupation on the one hand, nor the desire for his companions' amusements on the other, was then the only one at leisure to look about him, to observe through the alders that fringed the bank the hide-and-seek glint of the River; to gaze with wonder and a little awe on the canopy of waving light green that to his childish sense of proportion seemed as far above him as the skies themselves; to notice how the sunlight splashed through the rifts as though it had been melted and poured down from above; to feel the friendly warmth of

summer air under trees; to savour the hot springwood-smells that wandered here and there in the careless irresponsibility of forest spirits off duty. This was Bobby's first experience with woods; and his keenest perceptions were alive to them. The tall trunks of trees rising from the graceful, fragile, half-translucence of undergrowth; little round tunnels to a distant delicate green; lights against shadows, and shadows against lights; the wing-flashes of birds hidden and mysterious; and above all the marvellous green transparence of all the shadows, which tinted the very air itself, so that to the little boy it seemed he could bathe in it as in a clear fountain — all these came to him at once. And each brought by the hand another wonder for recognition, so that at last the picnic party disappeared from his vision, the loud and laughing voices were hushed from his ears. He stood there, lips apart, eyes wide, spirit hushed, looking half upward. The light struck down across him.

The picnic party went about its business unaware of the wonderful thing transacting in their very presence. Men do not grow as plants, so many inches, so many months. The changes prepare long and in secret, without

visible indication. Then swiftly they take place. The qualities of the soul unfold silently their splendid wings.

After a moment the boys ran whooping through the woods from one direction demanding food; the two men came shouting from the other carrying a pail of water and an open basket of magnificent peaches. Bobby shivered slightly, and looked about him, half dazed, as though he had just awakened. Then quietly he crept to a tree near the table and sat down. For perhaps a minute he remained there; then with a rush came the reaction. Bobby was wildly and reprehensibly naughty.

Once in a while, and after meals, Mrs. Orde allowed him a single piece of sponge-cake; no more. But now, Bobby, catching the eye of Celia upon him, grimaced, pantomimed, to call attention, and deliberately *broke* off a big chunk of Mrs. Owen's frosted work of art and proceeded to devour it. Celia's eyes widened with horror; which to Bobby's depraved state of mind was reward enough. Then Mrs. Orde uttered a cry of astonishment; Mrs. Owen a dignified but outraged snort; and Bobby was yanked into space.

After the storm had cleared, he found himself,

somewhat dishevelled, aboard the *Robert O*, entrusted to Captain Marsh, provided with three bread-and-butter sandwiches, and promised a hair-brush spanking for the morrow.

Mrs. Orde was not only mortified, but shocked to the very depths of her faith.

"I don't know how to explain it!" she said again and again. "Bobby is always so good about such things! I've brought him up — and *deliberately*. My dear Mrs. Owen, such a beautiful frosting, and to have it ruined like that!"

But Mrs. Fuller, fat, placid, perhaps slightly stupid, here rose to the heights of what her husband always admiringly called "horse sense,"

"Now, Carroll," she said, "stop your worrying about it. You'll get yourself all worked up and spoil your lunch and ours, all for nothing. Children will be naughty sometimes. I was naughty myself. So were you, probably. That's human nature. Just don't worry about it and spoil the good time."

Mrs. Orde thereupon fell silent, for she was a sensible woman and could see the point as to lessening the other's enjoyment. Little by little she cooled off, until at last she was able to join in the fun; although always in the background

of her mind persisted the necessity of knowing a *reason* for such an outbreak.

The flurry over, Welton insisted that they all admire the peaches.

"Best Michigan produces," he boasted. "Every one big as a coffee-cup; and perfect in shape, colour and flavour. Freestone, too. Nothing exceptional about them either. Millions more just like 'em. Can't match them anywhere in the world."

"Saw by the paper this spring that the peach crop was ruined by the frost," marvelled Carlin.

Taylor laughed.

"My dear fellow, the Michigan peach crop is destroyed regularly *every* spring. Seem to be enough peaches by August, however."

They fell to on the lunch. When they had eaten all they could, there still remained enough to have fed four other picnics of the same size as their own.

Bobby remained not long cast down, however.

"Been at it, have you?" observed Captain Marsh after the irate parent had departed. "What was it this time?"

"I ate a piece of cake," replied Bobby.

"H'm! That doesn't sound very bad."

"It was Mrs. Owen's cake," supplemented Bobby.

"I see," said the Captain gravely in enlightenment. "What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to eat my lunch," Bobby informed him, showing the three bread-and-butter sandwiches.

"H'm. So 'm I," said the Captain. "Better join me."

They entered the pilot-house and established themselves facing each other on the wide leather seat. The Captain produced a tin dinner-pail with a cupola top such as Bobby had often seen men carrying, and which he had always desired to investigate. This came apart in the middle. The top proved to contain cold coffee all sugared and creamed. The bottom had a fringed red-checked napkin, two slabs of pie, two doughnuts, and four thick ham sandwiches made of coarse bread. They ate. Captain Marsh insisted on Bobby's accepting a doughnut and a piece of pie. Bobby did so, with many misgivings; but found them delicious exceedingly because they were so different from what he was used to at home.

"Now," said the Captain, brushing away the crumbs with one comprehensive gesture, "what do you want to do now? You got to stay aboard, you know?"



"BEEN AT IT, HAVE YOU?" OBSERVED CAPTAIN MARSH



"Can't we fish?" suggested Bobby timidly.

The Captain looked about him with some doubt.

"Well," he decided at last, "we might try. The time of day's wrong, and the place don't look much good; but there's no harm trying."

Two long bamboo poles fitted with lines, hooks, and sinkers were slung alongside the deck-house. Captain Marsh produced worms in a can. The two sat side by side, dangling their feet over the stern, the poles slanting down toward the dark water, silent and intent. In not more than two minutes Bobby felt his pole twitch. Without much difficulty he drew to the surface a broad flat little fish that flashed as he turned in the water.

"Hi!" cried Bobby, "there *are* fish here!"

"Oh, that's a sunfish," said Captain Marsh. Bobby looked up.

"Aren't sunfish good?" he inquired anxiously.

Captain Marsh opened his mouth to reply, caught Bobby's apprehensive and half-disappointed expression, and thought better of it.

"Why, sure!" said he. "They're a fine fish."

At the end of an hour Bobby had acquired a goodly string. Captain Marsh early drew in his line, saying he preferred to smoke. Bobby

had an excellent time. He was very much surprised at the return of the picnic party. The period of punishment had not hung heavy.

By the time all had embarked, the steam pressure was up. The *Robert O* swung down stream for home.

But now Celia, forgetting her earlier caprice of indifference, watched Bobby constantly. After a little he became aware of it, and was flattered in his secret soul, but he attempted no more advances, nor did he vouchsafe her the smallest glance. Soon she sidled over to him shyly.

"What made you do it?" she asked in a whisper.

"Do what?" pretended Bobby.

"Break Mrs. Owen's cake."

"'Cause I wanted to."

"Didn't you know 't was very bad?"

"'Course."

Celia contemplated Bobby with a new and respectful interest. "I wouldn't dare do it," she acknowledged at last. In this lay confession of the reason for her change of whim; but Bobby could not be expected to realize that. With masculine directness he seized the root of his grievance and brought it to light.

"Why were you so mean this noon?" he demanded.

She made wide eyes.

"I wasn't mean. How was I mean?"

"You went away; and you wouldn't look at me or talk to me."

"I didn't care whether I talked to you or not," she denied. "I wanted to be with my mamma."

So on the return trip, too, Bobby had a good time. The wharf surprised him; and the flurry of disembarkation prevented his saying formal good-bye to Celia. He waved his hand at her, however, and grinned amiably. To his astonishment she gave him the briefest possible nod over her shoulder; and walked away, her hand clasping that of her mother, even yet a dainty airy figure in her mussed white dress still flaring with starch, her slim black legs, and her wide leghorn hat with the red roses.

The hurt and puzzle of this lasted him to his home, and caused him to forget the spanking in prospect. He ate his supper in silence, quite unaware of his mother's disapproval. After supper he hunted up Duke and sat watching the sunset behind the twisted pines on the sandhills. He did much cogitating, but arrived nowhere.

"Bobby!" called his mother. "Come to bed."

He said good night to Duke, and obeyed.

"Now, Bobby," said Mrs. Orde, "I don't like to do this, but you have been a very naughty boy to-day. Come here."

Bobby came. The hair brush did its work. Usually in such case Bobby howled before the first blow fell, but to-night he set his lips and uttered no sounds. *Slap! slap! slap! slap!* with deliberate spaces between. Bobby was released. He climbed down, his soul tense, with agony, but his face steady — and laughed!

It was not much of a laugh, to be sure, but a laugh it was. Mrs. Orde, shocked, scandalized, outraged and now thoroughly angry, yanked her son again across her knees.

"Why! I never heard of anything like it!" she cried. "You naughty, *naughty* boy! I don't see what's got into you to-day. I'll teach you to laugh at my spankings!"

Bobby did not laugh at this spanking. It was more than a stone could have borne. After the fifth well-directed and vigorous smack, he howled.

Later, when the tempest of sobs had stilled to occasional gulps, Mrs. Orde questioned him about it. They were rocking back and forth in

the big chair, the twilight all about them. Bobby said he was sorry and his mamma had cuddled him and loved him, and all was forgiven.

"Now, Bobby, tell mamma," soothed Mrs. Orde. "Why were you such a bad little boy as to laugh at mamma when she spanked you just now?"

"I wasn't bad," protested Bobby, "I was trying to be good. You told me not to cry when I got hurt, but to jump up and laugh about it."

"Oh, my baby, my poor little man!" cried Mrs. Orde between laughter and tears.

They rocked some more.

"Now, Bobby, tell mamma," insisted Mrs. Orde gently. "Why did you break Mrs. Owen's cake? Were you as hungry as all that?"

"No ma'am," replied Bobby.

"Why did you do it, then?"

"I don't know."

Mr. Orde laughed uproariously when told of Bobby's attempt to be brave under affliction.

"The little snoozer!" he cried. "Guess I'll go up and see him."

Bobby loved to have his father lie beside him on the bed. They never said much; but the little boy lay, looking up through the dimness,

bathed in a deep comfortable content at the man's physical presence.

To-night they lay thus in silence for at least five minutes. Then Bobby spoke.

"Papa," said he "don't you think Celia Carleton is pretty?"

"Very pretty, Bobby."

Another long silence.

"Papa," complained Bobby at last, "why does Celia be nice to me; and then not be nice to me; and change all the while?"

Mr. Orde chuckled softly to himself.

"That's the way of 'em, Bobby," said he. "There's no explaining it. All little girls are that way — and big girls, too," he added.

So long a pause ensued that Mr. Orde thought his son must be asleep, and was preparing softly to escape.

"Papa," came the little boy's voice from the darkness, "I like her just the same."

"Carroll," said Mr. Orde to his wife as blinking he entered the lighted sitting room, "you can recover your soul's equanimity. I've found out why he broke into the cake."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Orde eagerly.

"He was showing off before that little Carleton girl," replied Mr. Orde.

III

HIDE AND COOP

Early Monday morning Bobby was afoot and on his way to the Ottawa Hotel. He ran fast until within a block of it; then unexpectedly his gait slackened to a walk, finally to a loiter. He became strangely reluctant, strangely bashful about approaching the place. This was not to be understood.

Usually when he wanted to go play with any one, he simply went and did so. Now all sorts of barriers seemed to intervene, and the worst of it was that these barriers he seemed to have spun from out his own soul. Then too a queer feeling suddenly invaded his chest, exactly like that he remembered to have experienced during the downward rush of a swing. Bobby could not comprehend these things; they just were. He was fairly to the point of deciding to go back and look at the Flobert Rifle, in the shop window, when a group of children ran out from the wide office doors to the croquet court at the side.

Among them Bobby made out Celia, a different Celia from her of the picnic. Her curls danced as full of life and light as ever; the biscuit brown of her complexion glowed as smooth and clean; even from a distance Bobby could see the contrast of her black eyes; but on her head she wore a brown chip hat; her gown was of plain blue gingham; her slim straight legs were encased in heavy strong stockings. She looked like a healthy, lively little girl out for a good time; and the sight cheered Bobby's wavering courage as nothing else could. His vague ideas of retreat were discarded.

But he did not know how to approach. The children inside the low rail fence were placing the brilliantly-striped wooden balls in a row in order to determine by 'pinking' at the stake who should have the advantageous last shot. Bobby, irresolute, halted outside, shifting uneasily, wanting to join the group, but withheld by the unwonted bashfulness. Amid shouts and exclamations each clicked his mallet against his ball, and immediately ran forward with the greatest eagerness to see how near the stake he had come. At last the group formed close. A moment's dispute cleared. Celia had won.

and now stood erect, her cheeks flushing, her eyes dancing with triumph. In so doing she caught sight of Bobby hesitating outside.

“Why, there’s Bobby!” she cried. “Come on in, Bobby, and play!”

At the sound of her voice, all his timidity vanished. He entered boldly and joined the others.

“This is Bobby,” announced Celia by way of general introduction, “and this,” she continued, turning to Bobby, “is Gerald, and Morris, and Kitty and Margaret.”

“Hullo,” said Morris, “Grab a mallet, and come on.”

Bobby liked Morris, who was a short, red-headed boy of jolly aspect. Gerald, a youth of perhaps twelve years of age, rather tall and slender, of very dark, clear, pale complexion, nodded carelessly. Bobby took an immediate distaste for him. He looked altogether too superior, and sleepy and distinguished — yes, and stylish. Bobby was very young and inexperienced; but even he could feel that Gerald’s round straw hat, and norfolk-cut jacket, and neat, loose, short trousers buckled at the knee contrasted a little more than favourably with his own chip hat, blue blouse and tight breeches.

Also he was already dusty, while Gerald was immaculate.

As to Kitty and Margaret, they were nice, neat, clean, pretty little girls — but not like Celia!

Bobby found a mallet and ball in the long wooden case, and joined the game. He was not skilful at it, and soon fell behind the others in the progress through the wickets. Indeed, when, after two strokes, he had at last gained position for the “middle arch,” he met Gerald coming the other way. Gerald shot for his ball; hit it; and then, with a disdainful air, knocked Bobby away out of bounds across the lawn. This was quite within the rules, but it made Bobby angry just the same. As he trudged doggedly away after his ball, he felt himself very much alone under what he thought must be the derisive eyes of all the rest. The game ended before he had gained the turning stake.

“Skunked,” remarked Morris cheerfully.

Gerald said nothing, did not even look; but Bobby liked Morris’s comment better than Gerald’s assumed indifference.

“Let’s have another game — partners,” suggested Gerald to Celia.

But Bobby, to his own great surprise, found courage to speak up.

"Let's not play croquet any more," said he. "Let's have a game of Hi-Spy."

"It's too hot," interposed Gerald quickly.

The others said nothing, but with the child's keen instinct for the drama, had drawn aside in favour of the principal actors. Gerald stood by the stake, leaning indolently on his mallet, his long black lashes down-cast over the dark pallor of his cheeks, very handsome, very graceful. Bobby had drawn near on Celia's other side. The comparison showed all his freckles and the unformed homeliness of his rather dumpy, sturdy figure; it showed also the honest dull red of his cheeks and the clear unfaltering gray of his eyes. Celia, between them, looked down, tapping her croquet ball with the tip of her shoe.

"I don't think it's very hot," she said at last, looking up. "Let's play Hi-Spy."

A wave of glowing triumph rushed through Bobby's soul. Gerald merely shrugged his shoulders.

But unmixed joy was to be a short-lived emotion with Bobby as far as Celia was concerned. He knew lots of fine hiding-places

about the grounds of the Ottawa, and he promised himself that he would take Celia to them. They could hide together; and that would be delightful.

Morris counted out first to be "it." He leaned his arm against a post, his head against his arm, and closed his eyes.

"Ten-ten-double-ten-forty-five-fifteen" he repeated over ten times as rapidly as possible. That was his way of counting a thousand.

The other children scurried off as fast as their legs could carry them in order to reach concealment before the end of the count. And somehow, against his will, Bobby found himself cast in the hurry of the moment with Kitty instead of with Celia. And Celia he saw disappear in Gerald's convoy.

"Coming!" roared Morris, uncovering his eyes.

"Oh dear, he's coming!" cried Kitty in distress, "and we're not hid! Where shall we go? Don't you know any good places?"

But Bobby, still confused over his disappointment, had not the wits wherewith to think in so pressing an emergency. He vacillated between pillar and post; and so was espied by the goal-keeper. Morris immediately set himself in rapid motion for the "home."

"One, two, three for Bobby Orde!" he cried, striking the post vigorously. "One, two, three for Kitty Clark!"

The two reluctantly appeared.

"There, now, you got us caught," accused Kitty sulkily.

"Never mind," consoled Bobby, "anyway he saw me first. I'm it!"

Morris was off prowling after more prey. As he disappeared around the corner of the building a rapid flash of skirts was visible from the other. Morris caught it; and, turning, raced with all his might back to the home goal. But Margaret had too good a head start. She arrived first; and immediately began to dance around and around, her long legs twinkling, her two thick braids flying.

"In free! In free!" she shrieked over and over again.

There still remained Celia and Gerald. Morris set himself very carefully to find them, prowling into all likely places, but returning abruptly every moment or so in order to forestall or discourage attempts to get in. He proved unsuccessful; nor did his absence seem to afford the others chances to run home. The other three watched with growing impatience.

"Oh, Morris, let them in!" begged Kitty. Bobby felt a glow of kindness toward her for making the suggestion. He would not have proffered it himself for worlds. Morris, however, was obstinate. He continued his search for at least ten minutes. At last he had to give in.

"All sorts in free!" he called at the top of his voice.

Celia and Gerald appeared smiling and unruffled. They refused to divulge their hiding-place.

"We'll save it until next time," said Celia.

Bobby blinded his eyes and counted. He had no interest in the game, and experienced inside himself a half-sick, hollow feeling unique in his experience. Morris, Kitty and Margaret got in free, simply because his attention was too lax. Gerald and Celia had once more disappeared. After a decent interval the others became clamorous again for general amnesty.

"Blind again, Bobby," they urged, "let them in free."

But Bobby continued to search beyond the places he had already looked. His further knowledge of the hotel grounds was a negligible quantity; so he began, consistently to eliminate all possibilities. From one corner he zigzagged

back and forth, testing every nook and cranny that might contain a human being. Thus he examined every foot of the place; but without results. He was puzzled; but he would not give up. Methodically, and to the vast disgust of the others, he began over again at the corner from which he had started. No results.

"No fair outside the grounds!" he shouted. To this of course, no answer came.

"Give it up!" urged the others.

"I won't!" insisted Bobby doggedly.

He did not know where to search next, so he looked up. The hotel was provided with a broad shady flat-roofed verandah. At the edge of this roof, projecting the least bit above, Bobby glimpsed a fold of blue. The pair were evidently lying at full length in the spacious water gutter. The blue could be nothing but the gingham of Celia's dress. Nevertheless Bobby walked to goal and calmly announced.

"One, two, three for Gerald — on the verandah roof!" And then, after a deliberate pause, "All sorts in free!"

Gerald blinded. Bobby, with determination, took Celia's hand, and breathlessly the pair sped away. The little boy's first move was to place the hotel building between himself and Gerald.

"Can you climb a fence?" he asked hurriedly.

"If it isn't too high."

"Come on then, I know a dandy place."

Bobby attacked the board fence behind the hotel. Two packing-boxes of different heights made the problem of ascent easy. But the other side was a sheer drop; and Celia was afraid.

"I can't!" she cried. "It's too far!"

"Just drop," advised Bobby desperately. "Hurry up! He'll be around the corner!"

"I daren't!" cried poor Celia. "You go first,"

Promptly Bobby dangled; and dropped.

"See; it's easy. Come on, I'll catch you!"

Finally Celia wiggled over the edge, shut her eyes, and let go. She landed directly on Bobby, and the two went down in a heap.

"Come on!" whispered Bobby. "Scoot!"

Before them rose a whitewashed barn. Celia's hand in his, Bobby darted in at the open doorway, and more by instinct than by sight, found a rickety steep flight of stairs and ascended to the hay-mow.

"There, isn't that great?" he whispered.

They sank back on the soft fragrant hay, and breathed luxuriously after the haste of

the last few moments. A score of mice had scurried away at their abrupt entrance; and the fairy-like echoes of these animals' tiny feet seemed to linger in the twilight. Through cracks long pencils of sunlight lay across the hay and the dim criss-cross of the rafters above. Dust motes crossed them in lazy eddies, each visible for a golden moment as it entered the glow of its brief importance, only to be blotted into invisibility as it passed.

"Is this a fair hide?" whispered Celia.
"This is outside the grounds."

"It's the hotel barn," replied Bobby. "I bet he doesn't find us here."

They fell silent, because they were hiding, and in that silence they unconsciously drew nearer to each other. The delicious aroma of the hay overcame their spirits with a drowsiness. New sensations thronged on Bobby's spirit, made receptive by the narcotic influences of the tepid air, the mysterious dimness, the wands of gold, the floating brief dust-motes. He wanted to touch Celia; and he found himself diffident. He wanted to hear her voice; and he suddenly discovered in himself an embarrassment in addressing her which was causeless and foolish. He wanted to look at her; and he

did so; but it was not frankly and openly, as he had always looked at people before. His shy side-glances delighted in the clear curve of her cheeks; the soft wheat-colour of her curls; the dense black of her half-closed eyes; the brown of her complexion; the sweet cleanliness of her. A faint warm fragrance emanated from her. Bobby's heart leaped and stood still. All at once he knew what was the matter. It is a mistake to imagine that children do not recognize love when it comes to them. Love requires no announcement, no definition, no description. Only in later years when the first fresh purity of the heart has gone, we may perhaps require of him an introduction.

At once Bobby felt swelling within his breast a great longing, a hunger which filled his throat, a yearning that made him faint. For what? Who can tell. The idea of possession was still years distant; the thought of a caress had not yet come to him; the bare notion that Celia could care for him had not as yet unfolded its dazzling wings; even the desire to tell her was not yet born. Probably at no other period of a human being's life is the passion of love so pure, so divorced from all considerations of the material, or of self, so shiningly its ethereal

spiritual soul. Yet love it is; such love as the grown man feels for his mate; with all the great inner breathless longings of the highest passion.

The two lay curled side by side in their nests of hay. Time passed, but they did not know of it. The little boy was drowned in the depths of this new thing that had come to him. Celia filled the world to him. His reverie brimmed with her. Yet somehow also there came to him other things, unsought, and floated about him, and became more fully part of him than they had ever been before. It was an incongruous assortment; some of the knights of Sir Malory; the River above the booms, with the brown logs; a plume of white steam against the dazzling blue sky; the mellow six-o'clock church bell to which he arose every morning; the snake-fence by the sandhill as it was in winter, with the wreaths of snow; and all through everything the feel of the woods he had seen at the picnic, their canopy of green so far above, their splashes of sunlight through the rifts, the friendly summer warmth of their air, their hot, spicy wood-smells wandering to and fro; their tall trunks, their undergrowth, with the green tunnels far through them, the flashes of their birds' wings,

their green transparent shadows. These came to him, vaguely, and their existence seemed explained. They were because Celia was. And so, in the musty loft of an ill-kept stable, Bobby entered another portion of the beautiful heritage that was some day to be his.

IV

THE PRINTING PRESS

Next week was Bobby's birthday. He received many gifts, but as usual, saved the biggest package until the last. It had come wrapped in stout manila paper, tied with a heavy cord, and ornamented with the red sticker and seals of the Express Company. With some importance Bobby opened his new knife and cut the string. The removal of the wrapper disclosed a light wooden box. This was filled with excelsior, which in turn enclosed a paper parcel. A card read:

"For Bobby on his eleventh birthday, from Grandpa and Grandma."

Wrought to trembling eagerness by the continued delays, Bobby tore off the paper. Within was a small toy cast-iron printing press. Its ink-plate was flat and stationary. Its chase held two wooden grooves into which the type could be clamped by means of end screws. The mechanism was worked by a small square

lever at the back. Bobby opened a red pasteboard box to discover a miniature font of Old English type; a round tin box to uncover sticky but delicious-smelling printer's ink; a package to reveal the ink-roller and a parcel to complete the outfit with a pack of cheap pasteboard cards.

"What do you think of that?" cried Mrs. Orde.

"Now you'll be able to go into business, won't you?" said his father. "You might make me twenty-five calling cards for a starter."

Immediately breakfast was finished, then Bobby took his printing press upstairs and installed it on his little table. He would have liked very much to show Celia his gifts, but this Mrs. Orde peremptorily forbade.

After some manipulation he loosened the chase and laid it on the table. Then he began to pick out the necessary type and arrange it in the upper groove to spell his father's name. The replacement of the chase was easy after his experience in taking it out. Ink he smeared on the top plate, according to directions, rolling it back and forth with the composition roller until it was evenly distributed. Nothing remained now but to adjust the guides which

would hold the cards on the tympan. Bobby passed the inked roller evenly back and forth across the face of the type, inserted a card and bore down confidently on the lever. He contemplated this result:

DDO RHOI RR

Besides the transpositions and inversions, the impression itself was blurred and imperfect and smeared with ink.

After the first gasp of dismay, Bobby set to work in the dogged analytical mood which difficulties already aroused in him. The remedy for the inversion was plain enough. Bobby changed the type end for end and turned the R and the E right side up, but he worked slower and slower and his brow was wrinkled. Suddenly it cleared.

“Oh, I know!” said he aloud. “It’s just like the looking-glass!”

Satisfied on this point, he finished the resetting quickly and tried again. This time the name read correctly but it slanted down the card and was blurred and inky. Bobby fussed for a long time to get the line straight. Experiment seemed only to approximate. One end persisted in rising too high or sinking too low.

The problem was absorbing and all the time Bobby was thinking busily along, to him, original lines. At last, by means of a strip of paper and a pencil he measured equidistants from top and bottom of the platen, adjusted the guides in accordance and so that problem was solved. Bobby, flushed and triumphant, addressed himself to remedying the blurring.

“Too much ink,” said he.

Obviously the way to remedy too much ink was to rub some of it off and the directest means to that end was the ever-useful pocket handkerchief. The paste proved very sticky and the handkerchief was effective only at the expense of great labour. Bobby ruined three more cards before he established the principle that superfluous ink must be removed not only from the plate but from the roller and type as well.

But now further difficulties intervened before perfection. Some of the letters printed heavily and some scarcely showed at all. Here Bobby entered the realm of experiments which could not be lightly solved in the course of a half hour. He tried raising the type to a common level and locking them as tightly as possible, but always they slipped. He attempted to

insert bits of paper under what proved to be the shorter types. This improved the results somewhat, but was nevertheless far from satisfactory. By now he had learned not to use a fresh card every time. The first half-dozen were printed back and forth, front and behind. Bobby was smeared with more ink than the printing press. Scissors, pencils, paper, used cards and type were scattered everywhere. All the time his fingers were working his brain, too, was busy, searching back from the result to the cause, seeking the requisite modification. Mr. Orde, returning at noon, burst out laughing at the sight.

“Well, youngster,” said he, “how do you like being a printer?”

“Oh Bobby!” cried Mrs. Orde behind him. “You are a *sight!* Don’t you know it’s time to get ready for lunch?”

Bobby looked up in bewildered surprise. Lunch! Why he had hardly begun! His father was chuckling at him.

“Benzine will take it off,” said Mr. Orde to his wife.

Bobby caught at the hint.

“Will benzine take off the ink?” he cried eagerly.

"It's supposed to," replied his father; "but in your case ——"

"Can I have a little, in a bottle, and a toothbrush?" begged Bobby. He saw in a flash the solution of the ink problem.

"We'll see," said Mrs. Orde. "Come with me, now."

They disappeared in the direction of the bathroom. Mr. Orde examined the cards with some amusement.

"Well, sonny," said he to Bobby at lunch. "The printing doesn't seem to be a howling success. What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know," replied Bobby; "but I'll fix it all right yet."

Bobby was busy with his birthday party all that afternoon, but next morning he was afoot even before the Catholic Church bell called him. The press occupied him until breakfast time, but he made small progress. His father's morning paper filled him with envy by reason of its clear impression. After breakfast he begged a tiny bottle of benzine and an old toothbrush from his mother, and went at it again for nearly an hour. The benzine worked like a charm. The type came out bright as new and the old ink dissolved readily from the

platen and roller. Bobby took note that he should have cleared them the day before, as a night's neglect had left them sticky. With it all he seemed to have arrived at a dead wall. All his limited mechanical ingenuity was exhausted and still the letters printed either too deep or too light. About half-past nine he cleaned up and went down to the Ottawa.

His friends there were all sitting under the trees before the hotel, resting rather vacantly after a hard romp. Celia perched high on a root, her curls against the brown bark, her hat dangling by its elastic from a forefinger, her lips parted, her eyes vacant. Gerald leaned gracefully against the trunk. Bobby sat cross-legged on the ground watching her — and him. Kitty and Margaret reclined flat on their backs, gazing up through the leaves. Morris alone showed a trace of activity. He had fished from his pockets the short, blunt stub of a pencil, a penny and a piece of tissue paper. The latter he had superimposed over the penny and by rubbing with the pencil was engaged in making a tracing of the pattern on the coin. Through his preoccupation Bobby at last became cognizant of this process. He sat and watched it with increasing interest.

"By Jiminy!" he shouted leaping to his feet.

"What is it?" they cried, startled by the abrupt movement.

"I got to go home," said Bobby.

They expostulated vehemently, for his departure spoiled the even number for a game. But he would not listen, even to Celia's reproachful voice.

"I'll be back after lunch," he called, and departed rapidly. Duke arose from his warm corner, stretched deliberately, yawned, glanced at the children, half wagged his tail and finally trotted after.

Bobby rushed home as fast as he could; broke into the house like a whirlwind; tore upstairs and, breathless with speed and the excitement of a new idea, flung himself into the chair before his little table. He had seen the solution. To the flash of embryonic creative instinct vouchsafed him, Morris's penny had represented type, the inequalities of its design were the inequalities of alignment over which he had struggled so long and the pressure of the pencil and tissue paper paralleled the imposition of the card on the letters. But in the case of Morris's penny the type did not conform to the

paper and the pressure, *the paper conformed to the type.*

His brain afire with eagerness, Bobby first stretched several clean sheets of paper over the platen and clamped them down; then he inked the type and pressed down the lever. Thus he gained an impression on the platen itself. At this point he hesitated. On his father's desk down stairs was mucilage, but mucilage was strictly forbidden. The hesitation was but momentary, however, for the creative spirit in full blast does not recognize ordinary restrictions. With his own round-pointed scissors he cut out little squares of paper. These he pasted on the platen over the letters whose impression had been too faint. A few moments adjusted the guides. Bobby inked the type and inserted a fresh card. The moment of test was at hand.

He paused and drew a long breath. From one point of view the matter was a small one. From another it was of the exact importance of a little boy's development, for it represented the first fruits of all the hereditary influences that had silently and through the small experiences of babyhood, led him over the edge of the dark, warm nest to this first independent trial of the wings. He pressed the lever gently and took

out the card. It was not a very good job of printing; the ink was not quite evenly distributed, the type were so heavily impressed that they showed through the reverse of the card like stamping; *but each letter had evidently received the same amount of pressure!*

Bobby uttered a little chuckle of joy — he had not time for more — and plunged into the rectification of minor errors. And by noon the press was working steadily, though slowly, and a very neat array of *Mr. John Ordes* was spread out on the window drying.

The game was absorbing. Bobby brushed his type with the benzine and toothbrush; distributed it and set up another name — Miss Celia Carleton. He had printed nearly a dozen of these when his mother's voice behind him interrupted his labours.

“Robert,” said the voice sternly, “what are you doing with that mucilage?”

V

THE LITTLE GIRL

Bobby spent as much time with Celia as he was allowed. On Sunday he took her on his regular excursion to Auntie Kate — and Auntie Kate's cookies.

“Aren't you glad there was no Sunday School to-day?” he inquired blithely.

“I like Sunday School,” stated Celia.

Bobby stopped short and looked at her.

“Do you like church too?” he demanded.

“I love it,” she said.

“Do you like pollywogs?”

“Ugh, No!”

“Or stripy snakes?”

“They're *horrid!*”

“Or forts?”

“I don't know.”

“Or rifles an' revolvers?”

“I am afraid of them.”

“Or dogs?”

"I love dogs. I've got one home. His name is Pancho,"

"What kind is he?" asked Bobby with a vast sigh of relief at finding a common ground. He had been brought to realize yesterday that little girls differ from boys; but for a few dreadful, floundering moments this morning he had feared they might, so to speak, belong to a different race. Afterward he realized that it would not have mattered even if she had not liked dogs. He merely wished to be near her. When he left her he immediately experienced the strongest longing to be again where he could see her, and breathe the deep, intoxicating, delicious, clean influence of her near presence. And yet with her his moments of unalloyed happiness were few and his hours of sheer misery were many. Self-consciousness had never troubled Bobby before; but now in the presence of Gerald's slim elegance and easy, languid manner, he became acutely aware of his own deficiencies. His clothes seemed coarser; his hands and feet were awkward; his body dummer; his face rounder and more freckled. To him was born a great humility of spirit to match the great longing of it.

Nevertheless, as has been said, he and Duke

trudged down to the Ottawa every morning, and again every afternoon, or as many of them as Mrs. Orde permitted. He was content to come under the immediate spell of the dancing, sprite-like, sunny little girl. No thought of the especial effort to please, called courtship, entered his young head. He played with the children, and kept as close to Her as possible; that was all. And one evening, trudging home dangerously near six o'clock, he ran slap against the legend chalked in huge letters on a board fence:

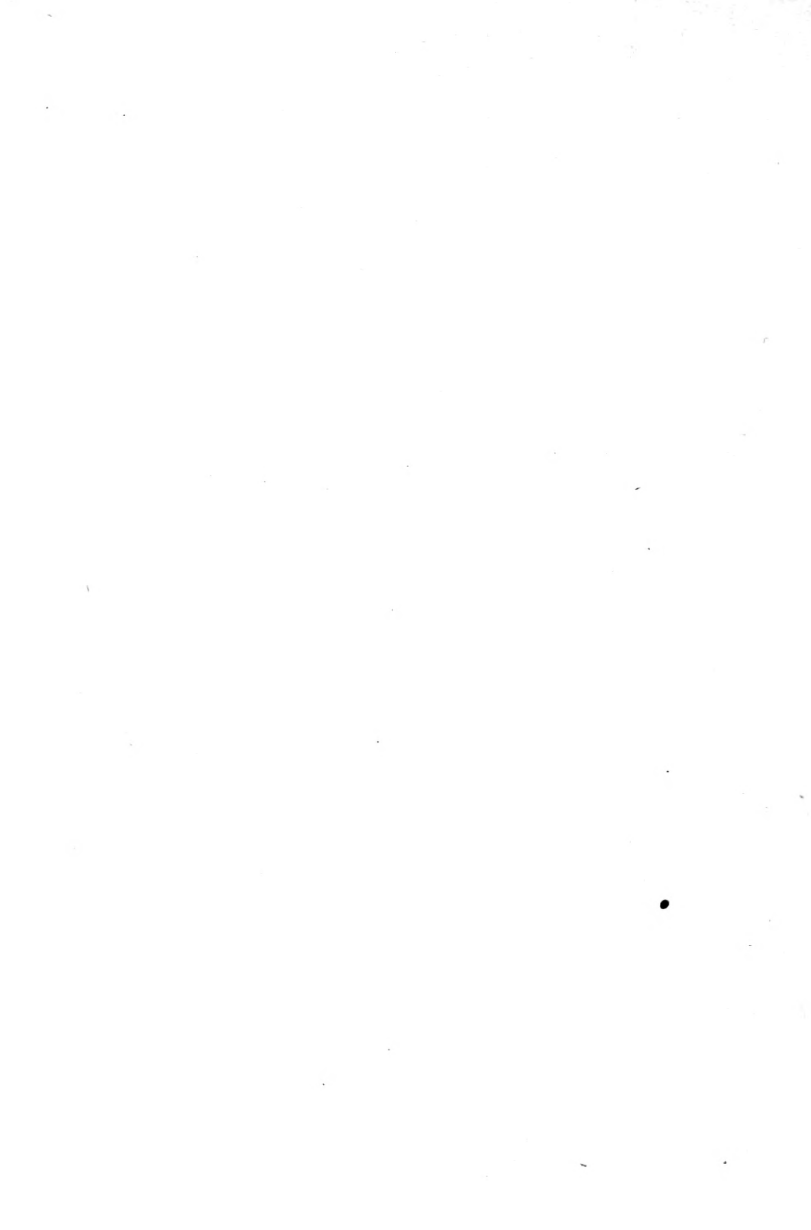
CELIA CARLETON and BOBBY ORDE

He stopped short, his heart jumping wildly. Often had he seen this coupling of names, other names; and he knew that it was considered a little of a shame, and somewhat of a glory. The sight confused him to the depths of his soul; and yet it also pleased him. He rubbed out the letters; but he walked on with new elation. The undesired but authoritative sanction of public recognition had been given his devotion. Gerald was not considered. Somebody had observed; so the affair must be noticeable to others. And with another tre-

mendous leap of the heart Bobby welcomed the daring syllogism that, since the somebody of the impertinent chalk had fathomed his devotion to her, might it not be possible, oh, remotely inconceivably possible, of course, that the unknown had equally marked some slight interest on her part for him? The board fence, the maple-shaded walk, the soft brown street of pulverized shingles, all faded in the rapt glory of this vision. Bobby gasped. Literally it had not occurred to him before. Now all at once he desired it, desired it not merely with every power of his child nature, but with the full strength of the man's soul that waited but the passing of years to spread wide its pinions. The need of her answer to his love shook him to the depths, for it reached forward and back in his world-experience, calling into vague, drowsy, fluttering response things that would later awaken to full life, and reanimating the dim and beautiful instincts that are an heritage of that time when the soul is passing the lethe of earliest childhood and retains still a wavering iridescence of the glory from which it has come. The question rose to his lips ready for the asking. He wanted to turn track on the instant, to call for Celia, to demand of her the response to his love.



HE RUBBED OUT THE LETTERS



And then, after the moment of exaltation, came the reaction. He was afraid. The thought of his stubby uninteresting figure came to him; and a deep sense of his unworthiness. What could she, accustomed to brilliant creatures of the wonderful city, of whom Gerald was probably but a mild sample, find in commonplace little Bobby Orde? He walked meekly home; and took a scolding for being late.

Nevertheless the idea persisted and grew. It came to the point of rehearsal. Before he fell asleep that very night, Bobby had ready cut and dried a half-dozen different ways in which to ask the question, and twice as many methods of leading up to it. In the darkness, and by himself, he felt very bold and confident.

The next morning, however, even after he had succeeded in sequestering Celia from her companions, he found it impossible to approach the subject. The bare thought of it threw him to the devourings of a panic terror. This new necessity tore him with fresh but delicious pains. He felt the need of finding out whether she cared for him as he had never conceived a need could exist; yet he was totally unable to satisfy it. By comparison the former misery of jealousy seemed nothing. Bobby lived con-

stantly in this high breathless state of delight in Celia; and misery in the condition of his love for her. The Fuller boys and Angus saw him no more; the little library was neglected; the wood-box half the time forgotten; and the arithmetic, always a source of trouble, tangled itself into a hopeless snarl of which Bobby's blurred mental vision could make nothing.

All of his spare time he spent at his toy printing press, trying over and over for a perfect result — unblurred, well-registered, well aligned — in the shape of calling cards for "Miss Celia Carleton."

As soon as they were done to his satisfaction, he wrapped them in a clumsy package, and set out for the Ottawa, followed, as always, by Duke.

He found Celia alone in a rocking chair.

"Why didn't you come down this morning?" she asked him at once.

Bobby held up the package and looked mysterious.

"This," said he.

"Oh! what is it?" she cried, jumping up.

"I made it," said Bobby.

"What is it?" insisted Celia. "Show it to me."

But Bobby thrust the package firmly into his pocket.

"Up past our house there's a fine sand-hill to slide down," said he, "and we got a fine fort over the hill, and I know where there's a place you can climb up on where you can see 'most to Redding."

"Show me what you've got!" pleaded Celia.

"I will," Bobby developed his plan, "if you'll come up and play in the fort."

"All right," agreed Celia in a breath; "I'll tell mamma I'm going. And I'll hunt up the others."

"I don't want the others to go," announced Bobby boldly.

She calmed to a great stillness, and looked at him with intent eyes.

"All right," she agreed quietly after a moment.

They walked up the street together, followed by the solemn black and white dog. The shop windows did not detain them, as ordinarily. At the fire-engine house they turned under the dense shade of the maples. But by the end of the second block said Bobby:

"We'll go this way."

He was afraid of encountering Angus, or perhaps the Fuller boys.

The sand-hill proved toilsome to Celia, but without a single pause she struggled bravely up its sliding, cascading yellow surface to the top. Then she stood still, panting a little, her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright, the tiniest curls about her forehead wet and matted with perspiration. With a great adoration, Bobby looked upon her slender figure held straight against the blue sky. Almost — almost dared he speak. At least that is what he thought until the words rose to his lips; and then all at once he realized what a wide gulf lay between the imagined and the spoken word.

“The fort’s over this way,” said he gruffly.

“Show me the package first,” insisted Celia.

Bobby drew out the cards, and thrust them into her hands.

“They’re for you,” he said hastily. “I did them on my printing press.”

Celia was delighted and wanted to say so at length, but Bobby had his sex’s aversion to spoken gratitude.

“Come on, see the fort,” he insisted.

He showed her the elaborate works and explained their uses, and pointed out the enemy of stumps charging patiently. Celia caught fire with the idea at once.



ALMOST—ALMOST DARED HE TO SPEAK



"I'll make bullets the way they did in the Colonies!" she cried.

"Have you 'Old Times in the Colonies,' too?" asked Bobby eagerly.

They seated themselves and talked of their books. Celia was just beginning the Alcott series. Bobby had never heard of them, and so they had to be explained. The children had romped and played games together; but they had never exchanged such ideas as their years had developed. For once Bobby forgot the fact of his love, and its delicious pains, and its need for something which he could not place, in the unselfconscious joy of intimate communion. He drew close to Celia in spirit; and his whole being expanded to a glow that warmed him through and through. The westering sun surprised them with the lateness of the hour. At the hotel gate Celia left him.

"My, but we had a good time!" said she.

With much trepidation Bobby next day suggested in face of the whole group that he and Celia should climb the high hill from which Bobby fondly believed he could see "'most to Redding." To his surprise, and to the surprise of the others, Celia consented at once. They climbed the hill in short stages, resting formally

every ten feet. Bobby they called the Guide; while Celia was assigned the duty of announcing the resting-places. There was a wood-road up the hill, but they preferred the steep side. Trees shaded it; and undergrowth veiled it. Little open spaces were guarded mysteriously and jealously by the thickets; little hot pockets held like cups the warmth of the sun. Birds flashed and disappeared; squirrels chattered indignantly; chipmunks scurried away. Occasionally they came to dense shade, and moss, and black shadow, and low sweet shrubs a few inches high, and the tinkle of a tiny streamlet. Once a tangle of raspberries in a little clearing fell across their way. Bobby had never happened on these. They had been well picked over by the squaws, who sold fruit in town by the pailful, but the children managed to find a few berries, and ate them, enjoying their warm, satiny feel.

Thus they climbed for a long time. The rests were frequent, the course not of the straightest. For many years their recollection of that hill was as of a mountain. Finally the top sprang at them abruptly, as though in joke.

"Come over this way, I'll show you," said Bobby.

He led the way to a point where the scant timber had in times past suffered a windfall. Through the opening thus made they looked abroad over the countryside. They could see the snake-fences about the farms, and the white dusty road like a ribbon and the stumps like black dots, and the waving green tops of the "wood lots" and far away the flash of the River.

Thus Bobby gained another of his great desires. Celia proved strangely acquiescent to suggestions for these excursions. Gerald's dreaded attractions relaxed their power over Bobby's spirit; and in corresponding degree Bobby regained the lost captaincy of his soul. The self-confidence which he lacked seeped gradually into him; and he began, though very tentatively, to recognize and respect his own value as an individual. These are big words to employ over the small problems of a child; yet in the child alone occur those silent developments, those noiseless changes which touch closest to true abstraction. Later in life our processes are stiffened by the material into forms of greater simplicity.

They explored the country about; and what the shortness of their legs denied them in the matter of actual distance, the large-

ness of their children's imaginations lavished bounteously.

Bobby had explored most of it all before — the stump pastures, the wood-lots, the hills, the beach, the piers, the upper shifting downs of sand — but now he saw them for the first time because he was showing them to Celia. One day they made their way under tall beech woods, through a scrub of cedars, and found themselves on the edge of low bluffs overlooking the yellow shore and the blue lake. Long years after he could remember it vividly, and all the little details that belonged to it — the flash of the waters, the dip of gulls, the gentle wash of the quiet wavelets against the shore, the thin strip of dark wet sand that marked the extent of their influences, and, in a long curve to the blue of distance, the uneven waste of the yellow dry sand on which lay and from which projected at all angles countless logs, slabs and timbers cast up derelict by the storms of years. But at the time he was not conscious of noticing these things. In the darkness of his room that night all he remembered was Celia standing bright and fair against the shadow of ancient twisted cedars.

VI

THE LITTLE GIRL (CONTINUED)

Every Saturday evening the Hotel Ottawa gave a hop in its dining room. Mrs. Carleton suggested that the Ordes dine with her, and afterward take in this function. The hop proper began at nine o'clock; but the floor for an hour before was given over to the children. Mrs. Orde accepted.

Promptly at half-past six, then, they all entered the dining room. Bobby, living in the town, had never taken a meal there. He saw a high-ceilinged, large room, filled with small, square and round tables arranged between numerous, slender, white plaster pillars. At the base of each pillar were still smaller serving tables each supporting a metal ice-water pitcher. Two swinging doors at the far end led out. Tall windows looked into the grounds where the children had been in the habit of playing.

People were scattered here and there eating. Statuesque ladies dressed in black, with white

aprons, stood about or sailed here and there, bearing aloft in marvellous equilibrium great flat trays piled high with steaming white dishes. They swung corners in grand free sweeps, the trays tilted far sideways to balance centrifugal force; they charged the swinging doors at full speed, and when Bobby held his breath in anticipation of the crash, something deft and mysterious happened at the hem of their black skirts and the doors flew open as though commanded by a magic shibboleth. They were tall and short, slender and stout, dark and light, but they had these things in common — they all dressed in black and white, their hair was lofty and of exaggerated waterfall, and their expressions never altered from one of lazy-eyed, lofty, scornful ennui. To Bobby they were easily the leading feature of the meal.

After dinner the party sat on the verandah a while, the elders conversing; the children feeling rather dressed up. By and by their other playmates joined them. The lights were lit, and shadows descended with evening coolness. From within came the sound of a violin tuning.

Immediately all ran to the dining room. The tables had been moved to one end where

they were piled on top of one another; the chairs were arranged in a row along the wall; the floor, newly waxed, shone like glass. A small upright piano manipulated by an elderly female in glasses; a tremendous bass viol in charge of a small man, and a violin played by a large man represented the orchestra.

All the children shouted, and began to slide on the slippery floor. Bobby joined this game eagerly, and had great fun. But in a moment the music struck up, the guests of the hotel commenced to drift in and the romping had to cease.

Gerald offered his arm to Celia, and they swung away in the hopping waltz of the period. Other children paired off. Bobby was left alone.

He did not know what to do, so he sat down in one of the chairs ranged along the wall. After a minute or so Mrs. Carleton and the Ordes came in. Bobby went over to them.

"Don't you dance, Bobby?" asked Mrs. Carleton kindly.

"No, ma'am," replied Bobby in a very small voice.

When the music stopped, the children gathered in a group at the lower end of the hall. Bobby

joined them; but somehow even then he felt out of it. Celia's cheeks were flushed bright with the exercise and pleasure. Her spirits were high. She laughed and chatted with Gerald vivaciously. Poor Bobby she included in the brightness of her mood, but evidently only because he happened to be in the circle of it. She was sorry he did not dance; but she loved it, and just now she could think of nothing else but the enjoyment of it. Bobby could not understand that there was nothing personal in this. He saw, with a pang, that Gerald danced supremely well; that Morris romped through the steps with a cheerful hearty abandon not without its attraction; that Tad Fuller, who had come in with his mother and his brother, and half a dozen others whom Bobby knew, all made creditable performers; that even Angus, red-faced, awkward, perspiring as he was, could yet command the hand, time and attention of any little girl he might choose to favour. He himself was useless; and therefore ignored.

At the end of the children's hour he said good night miserably, and trailed along home at his parents' heels. Ordinarily he liked to be out after dark. The stars and the velvet

shadows and the magic transformations which the night wrought in the most ordinary and accustomed things attracted him strongly. But now he was too conscious of a smarting spirit. Mr. and Mrs. Orde were talking busily about something. He could not even get a chance to ask a question; and that seemed the last straw. His lips quivered, and he had to remember very hard that he was *not* a little girl in order to keep back the tears.

Finally the talk died.

"Mamma," blurted out Bobby.

"Yes?"

"Can't I learn how to dance?"

The pair wheeled arm in arm and surveyed him. In the starlight his round child face showed white and anxious.

"Why, of course you can, darling," replied Mrs. Orde, "Don't you remember mamma wanted you to go to dancing school last winter, and you wouldn't go?"

"How soon does dancing school open?" demanded Bobby.

"I don't know. Not much before Christmas, I suppose."

Having thus made a definite resolution to remedy matters, Bobby felt better, even though

he would have to wait another year. This recovery of spirit was completed the next day. He went with some apprehension to ask Celia to walk again. She had seemed to him so aloof the night before, that he could hardly believe her unchanged. However, she assented to the expedition with alacrity. Hardly had they quitted the hotel grounds when Bobby shot his question at her.

"Celia," said he, "if I learn how to dance this winter will you dance with me when you come back next summer?"

"Why of course," said Celia.

"Will you dance with me a lot?"

"Yes."

"Will you dance with me more than you do with any one else?"

Celia pondered.

"I don't know," she said slowly. She paused, her eyes vague. "I guess so," she added at last.

"Then I'll learn," said Bobby.

"It's lots of fun," said she.

Bobby trod on air. Without his conscious intention their course took direction to the river front. They walked to the left along the wide, artificial bank of piling. Beneath them the

water swished among the timbers. On one side were the sand-hills, on the other the blue, preoccupied river. Across the stream was another façade of piles, unbroken save for the little boatslips where the Life Saving men had their station. A strong sweet breeze came from the Lake. Far down ahead they could just make out the twin piers that, jutting into the Lake, continued artificially the course of the river. The lighthouses on their ends were dwarfed by distance.

By and by Celia tired a little, so they sat and dangled their feet and watched the tiny scalloped blue wavelets dance in the current. A passer-by stopped a moment to warn them.

"Look out, youngsters, you don't fall in," said he.

Bobby still exalted with the favour he had been vouchsafed, looked up with dignity.

"*I* am taking care of this little girl," he said deliberately, and turned his back.

The man chuckled and passed on.

For a long time they sat side by side looking straight out before them.

"Celia," said Bobby without turning his head, "I love you. Do you love me?"

"Yes," said Celia steadily.

Neither stirred by so much as a hair's breadth. After a little they arose and returned to the hotel. Neither spoke again.

Strangely enough the subject was not again referred to, although of course the children continued to play together and the excursions were not intermitted. There seemed to be nothing to say. They loved each other, and they were glad of each other's nearness. It sufficed.

Each morning Bobby awoke with a great uplift of the spirit, and a great longing, which was completely appeased when he had come into Celia's presence. Each evening he retired filled with an impatience for the coming day, and with divine rapture of little memories of what had that day passed. It seemed to him that hour by hour he and Celia drew closer in a sweet secret, intimacy that nevertheless demanded no outer symbol. When he spoke to her of the simplest things, or she to him, he experienced a warm, cosy drawing near, as though beneath the commonplace remark lay something hidden and subtle to which each must bend the ear of the spirit gently. This was the soul of it, a supreme inner gentleness one to the other, no matter how boisterous, how laughing, how brusque

might be the spoken word. And in correspondence all the beautiful sun-lit summer world took on a new softness and splendour and glory in which they walked, but whose source they did not understand.

This much for the essence of it. But of course, Bobby, being masculine must give presents after his own notion, and being a small boy must give them according to his age. The quarter he had earned from his father he invested in a pack of cards on the upper left-hand corner of which were embossed marvellous doves, wonderful flowers and miraculous tangles of scroll-work in colour. These he printed with Celia's name and address. Near the wharf and railroad station stood a small booth from which a discouraged-looking individual tried to sell curios. Bobby's eye fell on a cheap bracelet of silver wire from which dangled half a dozen moonstones. It caught his eye; day by day his desire for it grew; finally he asked advice on the subject.

"No, Bobby," replied his mother, "I don't think Celia would care for it. It is cheap-looking. She has several very pretty bangles already; and this is not a good one."

Nevertheless, Bobby, being as we have said

thoroughly masculine, deliberated some days further, and bought it. The price was two dollars — an almost fabulous sum. Most men give their wives or sweethearts what they think they would like themselves were they women, and were a man to offer a gift. That is one reason why in so many bureau drawers are tucked away unused presents. Young as she was, Celia had the taste not to care for the moonstone bangle, but, like all the rest, she accepted it with genuine delight because Bobby gave it. She even wore it. These were the principal transactions of the kind; but anything Bobby particularly fancied he brought her. Shortly she became possessed of a bewildering collection consisting variously of large glass marbles with a twist of coloured glass inside; two or three lichi nuts, then a curiosity; a dried gull's wing; several exploded shotgun shells; and a "real," though broken-pointed chisel. Celia gave Bobby her tiny narrow gold ring with two little turquoises. He could just get it on his little finger, and wore it proudly, in spite of jeers. Being teased about Celia was embarrassing to the point of pain; but in the last analysis it was not unpleasant.

So matters slipped by. Abruptly the end

of August came. One day Bobby found Celia much perturbed.

"I can't go out long," she said, "I've got to help mamma."

"What doing?" asked Bobby.

But Celia shook her head dolefully.

"Come, let's go walk somewhere and I'll tell you," said she.

They crossed Main Street to the shaded street on which lived Georgie Cathcart.

"What is it?" demanded Bobby again.

"We are going home to-morrow," Celia announced mournfully. "Mamma has a letter."

Bobby stopped short.

"Going home!" he echoed.

"Yes," said Celia.

"Then we won't see each other till next summer!" he cried.

"No," said she.

"And we can't walk any more or — or ——" Bobby felt the lump rising in his throat.

"No," said Celia.

Bobby swallowed hard.

"Are — are you sorry?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Celia quietly. "Are you?"

"I don't know what I'm going to do!" cried Bobby desperately.

After a little, the main fact of the catastrophe being accepted, they talked of the winter to come.

"You'll write me some letters, won't you?" pleaded Bobby.

"If you write to me."

"Of course I will write to you. And you'll send me your picture, won't you? You said you would."

"I don't believe I have any," demurred Celia; "and mamma has them all; and they're very compensive."

"I'll give you one of mine," offered Bobby, "if I have to get it from the album. Please, Celia."

"I'll see," said she.

They were moving again slowly beneath the trees.

Bobby looked up the street; he looked back. He turned swiftly to her.

"Celia," he asked, "may I kiss you?"

"Yes," said Celia steadily.

She stopped short, looking straight ahead. Bobby leaned over and his lips just touched her cool smooth cheek. They walked on in silence. The next day Celia was gone.

VII

UNTIL THE LAST SHOT

There remained as consolation after this heart-breaking defection but two interesting things in life — the printing press and the Flobert Rifle. Somehow the week dragged through until Sunday, when Bobby duly scrubbed and dressed, had to go to church with his father and mother. Bobby, to tell the truth, did not care very much for church. Always his glance was straying to a single upper-section of one of the windows, which, being tipped inward at the bottom, permitted him a glimpse of green leaves flushed with sunlight. A very joyous bird emphasized the difference between the bright world and this dim, decorous interior with its faint church aroma compounded of morocco leather, flowers, and the odour of Sunday garments. Only when the four ushers tiptoed about with the collection boxes on the end of handles, like exaggerated corn-poppers, did the lethargy into which he had fallen break

for a moment. The irregular passage of the receptacle from one to another was at least a motion not ordered in the deliberate rhythm of decorum; and the clink of the money was pleasantly removed from the soporific. Bobby gazed with awe at the coins as they passed beneath his little nose. He supposed there must be enough of them to buy the Flobert Rifle.

The thought gave him a pleasant little shock. It had never occurred to him that probably the Flobert Rifle had a price. It had seemed so passionately to be desired as to belong to the category of the inaccessible — like Mr. Orde's revolver on the top shelf of the closet, or unlimited ice cream, or the curios locked behind the glass in Auntie Kate's cabinet. Now the revelation almost stopped his heart.

"Perhaps it doesn't cost more'n a thousand dollars!" he said to himself. And he had already made up his mind to save a thousand dollars for the purpose of getting a boat. The boat idea lost attraction. His papa had agreed to give half. Bobby lost himself in an exciting day-dream involving actual possession of the Flobert Rifle. He resolved that, on the way home, if the curtains were not down, he would take another look at the weapon.

The curtains were not down; but now, attached to the Flobert Rifle, was a stencilled card. Bobby set himself to reading it.

"First Prize," he deciphered, "An-nual Trap Shoot, Monrovia Sportsman's Club, Sep. 10, 1879."

For some moments the significance of this did not reach him. Then all at once a sob caught in his throat. It had never occurred to poor little Bobby that there might be other Flobert rifles in the world; and here this one was withdrawn from circulation, as it were, to be won as prize at the trap shooting.

Bobby did not recover from this shock until the following morning. Then a bright idea struck him, an idea filled with comfort. The Rifle was not necessarily lost, after all. He trudged down to the store, entered boldly, and asked to examine the weapon.

"My papa's going to win it and give it to me," he announced.

A very brown-faced man with twinkling gray eyes turned from buying black powder and felt wads to look at him amusedly.

"Hullo, Bobby," said he, "so your father's going to win the rifle and give it to you, is he? Are you sure?"

"Of course," replied Bobby simply; "my papa can do anything he wants to."

The man laughed.

"What do you know about rifles, and what would you do with one?" he asked.

"I know all about them," replied Bobby with great positiveness, "and I know where there's lots of squirrels."

The storekeeper had by now taken the Flobert from the show window. The other man reached out his hand for it.

"Well, tell me about this one," he challenged.

"It's a Flobert," said Bobby without hesitation, "and it weighs five and a half pounds; and its ri-fling has one turn in twenty-eight inches; and it has a knife-blade front sight, and a bar rear sight; and it shoots 22 longs, 22 shorts, C B caps, and B B caps. Only B B caps aren't very good for it," he added.

"Whew!" cried the man. "Here, take it!"

Bobby looked it over with delight and reverence. This was the first time he had enjoyed it at close hand. The blue of the octagon barrel was like satin; the polish of the stock like a mirror; the gold plating of the most fancy lock and guards like the sheen of silk. Bobby loved, too, the indescribable *gun* smell

of it — compounded probably of the odours of steel, wood and oil. With some difficulty he lifted it to his face and looked through the rather wobbly sights. Reluctantly he gave it back into the storekeeper's hands.

“Would you mind, please,” he asked, a little awed, “would you mind letting me see a box of cartridges?”

Stafford smiled and reached to the shelf behind, from which he took a small, square, delightful, red box. It had reading on it, and a portrait of the little cartridges it contained. Bobby feasted his eyes in silence.

“I — I know it's a prize,” said he at last. “But — how much *was* it?”

“Fifteen dollars,” replied Mr. Bishop.

Bobby's eyes widened to their utmost capacity.

“Why — why — why!” he gasped; “I thought it must be a thousand.”

Both men exploded in laughter, in the confusion of which, stunned, surprised, delighted and excited with the thought of eventual ownership, Bobby marched out the door, where he was joined gravely by Duke, his beautiful feather tail waving slowly to and fro as he walked.

Later in the day Kincaid, the spare, brown man with the twinkling gray eyes, met Mr. Orde on the street.

"Hullo, Orde!" he greeted. "Hear you have a sure win of the tournament."

"Sure win!" said Orde, puzzled, "What you talking about? You know I couldn't shoot against you fellows."

"Well, your small boy told me you were going to win that rifle down at Bishop's, and give it to him."

Orde's face clouded.

"He's been talking nothing but rifle for a month," said he. "I'm going West in September. Wouldn't have any show against you fellows, anyway."

When Bobby heard this paralyzing piece of news, his entire scheme of things seemed shattered. For a long time he sat staring with death in his heart. Then he arose silently and disappeared.

In the Proper Place, among Bobby's other possessions, was a small toy gun. Its stock was of pine, its lock of polished cast iron, and its barrel of tin. The pulling of the trigger released a spring in the barrel, which in turn projected a pebble or other missile a short and

harmless distance. Then a ramrod re-set the spring. When, the previous Christmas, Bobby had acquired this weapon, he had been very proud of it. Latterly, however, it had fallen into disfavour as offering too painful a contrast to the real thing as exemplified by the Flobert Rifle.

Bobby rummaged the darkness of the Proper Place until he found this toy gun. From the sack in his father's closet — forbidden — he deliberately abstracted a handful of bird-shot. Retiring to the woodshed, he set the spring in the gun, poured in what he considered to be about the proper quantity of shot, and solemnly discharged it at the high fence. The leaden pellets sprayed out and spattered harmlessly against the boards. Thrice Bobby repeated this. Then, quite without heat or rancour, he threw the toy gun and what remained of the shot over the fence into the vacant lot behind it. His common sense had foretold just this result to his experiment, so he was not in the least disappointed; but he had considered it his duty to try the only expedient his ingenuity could invent. For if — by a miracle — the little gun had discharged the shot with force; Bobby might — by a miracle — be permitted to par-

ticipate with it in the Shoot; and might — by a miracle — win the Flobert himself. Bobby was no fool. He marked the necessity of three miracles; and he did not in the least expect them. Merely he wished to fulfill his entire duty to the situation.

Saturday morning — the very day of the Shoot — Mr. Orde left for California.

After lunch Bobby trudged to Main Street, turned to the right, away from town, and set himself in patient motion toward the shooting grounds.

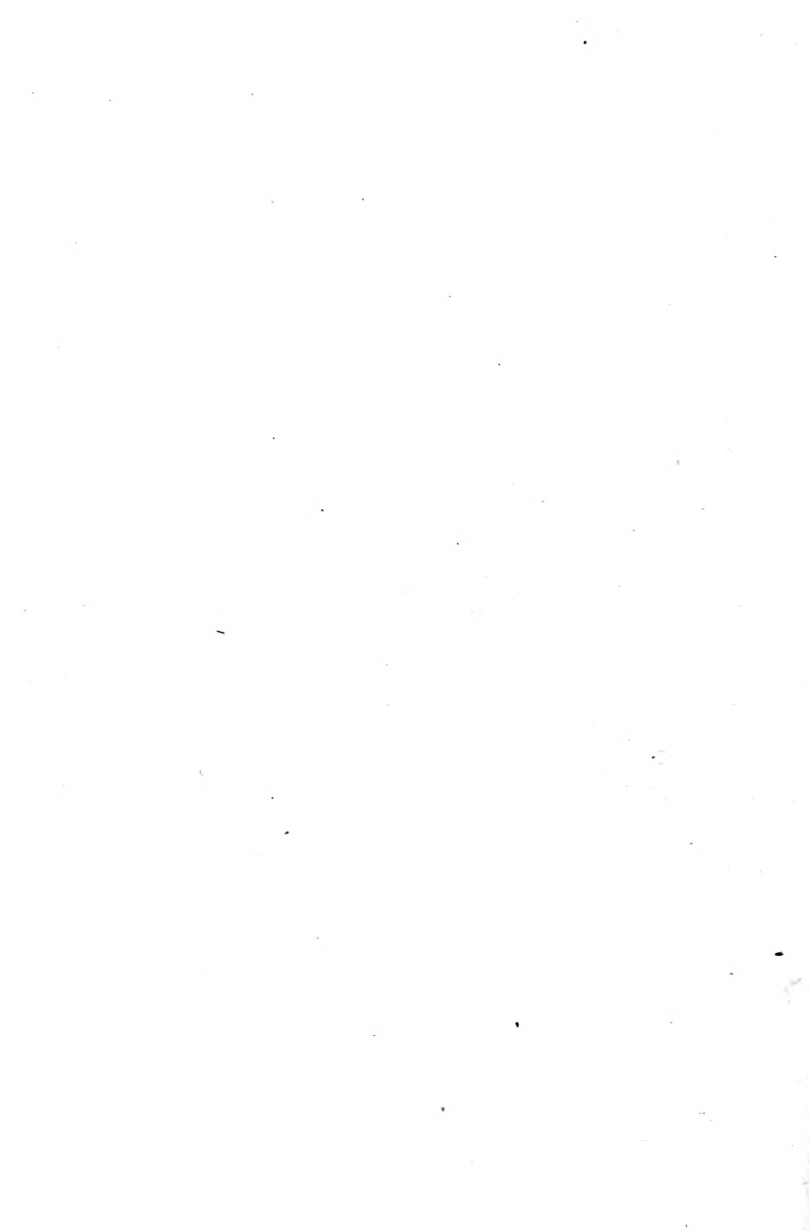
These were situated some two miles out along the county road. Bobby had driven to them many times, but had never attempted to cover the distance afoot. The sun was hot, and the way dusty. Many buggies and one large carry-all passed him, each full of the participants in the contest. No one thought of giving Bobby a lift, in fact no one noticed him at all. He could not help thinking how different it would be if only his father had not gone West.

“Hello!” called a hearty voice behind him.

He turned to see a yellow two-wheeled cart drawn by a gaunt white horse. On the seat close to the horse’s tail sat Mr. Kincaid.



"HELLO!" CALLED A HEARTY VOICE BEHIND HIM



"Going to the Shoot?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Bobby.

"Well, jump in."

Mr. Kincaid moved one side, and lifted half the seat so Bobby could climb in from the rear. Then he let the seat down again and clucked to the horse.

Mr. Kincaid wore an ancient gray slouch hat pulled low over his eyes; and a very old suit of gray clothes, wrinkled and baggy. Somehow, in contrast, his skin showed browner than ever. He looked down at Bobby, the fine good-humour lines about his eyes deepening.

"Well youngster," said he, "where's your father?"

Bobby's eyes fell; he kicked his feet back and forth. Beneath them lay Mr. Kincaid's worn leather gun-case, and an oblong japanned box which Bobby knew contained shells. For an instant he struggled with himself.

"He — he had to go to California," he choked; and looked away quickly to hide the tears that sprang to his eyes.

Mr. Kincaid whistled and raised his hand so abruptly that the old white horse, mistaking the movement for a signal, stopped dead, and instantly went to sleep.

“Get ap, Bucephalus!” cried Mr. Kincaid indignantly.

Bucephalus deliberately awoke, and after a moment’s pause moved on. To Bobby’s relief Mr. Kincaid said nothing further, but humped over the reins, and looked ahead steadily across the horse’s back. He stole a glance at the older man; and suddenly without reason a great wave of affection swept over him. He liked his companion’s clear brown skin, and the close clipped gray of his hair, and his big gray moustache beneath which the corners of his mouth quirked faintly up, and the network of fine crow’s feet at his temples, and the clear steady steel-colour of his eyes beneath the bushy brows. On the spot Bobby enshrined a hero.

But now they turned off the main road through a gap in the snake-fence, and followed many wheel tracks to the farther confines of the field where, under a huge tree they could see a group of men. These hailed Mr. Kincaid with joy.

“Hello, Kin, old man,” they roared. “Got here, did you? What day did you start? The old thing must be about dead. Lean him up against a tree, and come tell us about the voyage.”

"The cannon-ball express is strictly on schedule time, boys," replied Mr. Kincaid, looking solemnly at his watch.

He drove to the fence, where he tied Bucephalus. The other rigs were hitched here and there at distances that varied as the gun-shyness of the horses. Bobby proudly bore the gun-case. Mr. Kincaid lifted out the heavy box of shells.

Bobby took in the details of the scene with a delight that even his just cause for depression could not quench.

The men, some twenty in number, sprawled on the ground or sat on boxes. Before them stood a wooden rack with sockets, in which already were stacked a number of shotguns. Two pails of water flanked this rack, in each of which had been thrust a slotted hickory "wiper" threaded with a square of cloth. A fairly large empty wooden box, for the reception of exploded shells, marked the spot on which the shooters would stand. The rotary trap lay in plain sight eighteen yards away. That completed the list of arrangements, which were, in the light of modern methods, as every trap shooter of to-day will recognize, exceedingly crude.

The men, however, supplied the interest

which the equipment might lack. At that time every trap-shot was also a field shot. The class which confines itself to targets had not even been thought of. And good picked-shots have in common everywhere certain qualities, probably developed by the life in the open, and the unique influences of woodland and upland hunting. They are generous, and large in spirit, and absolutely democratic — the millionaire and the mechanic meet on equal ground — and deliberate in humour, and dry of wit. The quiet chaffing, tolerant, good-humoured, genuine intercourse of hunters cannot be matched in any other class.

The components of this group had each served his apprenticeship in the blinds or the cover. They knew each other in the freemasonry of the Field; and when they met together, as now, they spoke from the gentle magic of the open heart.

One exception must be made to this statement, however. Joseph Newmark, in advance of his time, shot methodically and well at the trap, never went afield, and maintained toward his neighbours an habitual dry attitude of politeness.

Bobby seated himself on the ground and prepared to listen with the completest enjoyment

These men were to him great or little according as they shot well or ill. That was to him the sole criterion. It did not matter to him that Mr. Heinzman controlled the largest interests in the western part of the state — he “couldn’t hit a balloon”; nor that young Wellman was looked upon as worthless and a loafer — he was well up among the first five.

Nearly everybody smoked something. The tobacco smelled good in the open air.

“Well,” remarked Kincaid, “if that Stafford party doesn’t show up before long, I’m going home. I can’t stand you fellows without some excitement for a counter-irritant.”

“That’s right, Kin,” called somebody, “Better start that old Buzzard toward town pretty soon, if you want to get in for breakfast — there’s a good moon!”

But at this moment a delivery wagon turned into the field, and drove briskly to the spot. From it Mr. Stafford descended spryly.

“Sorry to be a little late, boys; just couldn’t help it.” he apologized.

His arrival galvanized the crowd into activity. From the delivery wagon they unloaded boxes of shells, two camp stools and a number of barrels. The driver then hitched his horses

to the fence, and returned to act as trap-puller.

One of the barrels was rolled out to the trap, opened, and its contents carefully spilled on the ground. It contained a quantity of sawdust and brown glass balls. These were about the size of a base-ball, had an opening at the top, and were filled with feathers. John, the driver of the delivery wagon, climbed down into a pit below the trap. He set the spring of the trap and placed a glass ball in its receptacle at the end of one of the two projecting arms. A long cord ran from the trap back to the shooting stand.

Mr. Stafford opened a camp stool, sat down, and produced a long blank book. In this he inscribed the men's names. Each gave him two dollars and a half as an entrance fee. A referee and scorer were appointed from among the half-dozen non-shooting spectators.

"Newmark to shoot; Heinzman on deck!" called the scorer in a business-like voice.

The trapper ducked into his hole. Mr. Newmark thrust five loaded shells into his side pocket, picked his gun from the rack and stepped forward to the mark. Then he loaded one barrel of the gun and stood at ready. In

those days nobody thought of standing gun to shoulder, as is the present custom. The rule was, "stock below elbow."

"Ready," said he in his dry incisive voice.

"Ready," repeated the trap puller at his elbow.

"Pull!" commanded Mr. Newmark abruptly.

Immediately the trap began to revolve rapidly; after a moment or so it sprung, and the glass ball, projected violently upward, sailed away through the air. The mechanism of the trap was such that no one could tell precisely how long it would revolve before springing; nor in what direction it would throw the target. Nevertheless the mark offered would now, in comparison with our saucer-shaped target, be considered easy. Mr. Newmark brought his gun to his shoulder and discharged it apparently with one motion, before the ball had more than begun its flight. A roar of the noisy black powder shook the air. The glass sphere seemed actually to puff out in fine smoke. Only the feathers it had contained floated down wind.

"Dead!" announced the referee in a brisk business-like voice.

Mr. Newmark broke his gun and flipped the empty yellow shell into the box next him.

A cloud of white powder smoke drifted down over the group. Bobby snuffed it eagerly. He thought it the most delicious smell in the world; and so continued to think it for many years until the nitros displaced the old-fashioned compounds. Four times Mr. Newmark repeated his initial performance; then stepped aside.

"Heinzman to shoot; Wellman on deck!" announced the scorer.

Mr. Heinzman was already at the mark; and young Wellman arose and began to break open a box of shells. Mr. Newmark thrust his gun barrels into one of the pails and with the hickory wiper pumped the water up and down.

"He's a good snap-shot," Bobby heard a man tell a stranger, in a half-voice.

"Has a brilliant style," commented the other.

They fell into a low-toned conversation on the partridge season; and the ducks, to which Bobby listened with all his ears, the while his eyes missed nothing of what took place before him. Nobody now spoke aloud. The chaffing had ceased. Shooter's etiquette prohibited anything that even by remote possibility might "rattle" the contestants. Only the voices of the men at mark and the referee were heard, and the heavy *bang* of the black powder. Bobby

liked to listen to the referee. Reporting, as he did, hundreds of results in the course of the afternoon, his intonation became mechanical.

"Dead!" he snapped in the crispest, shortest syllable, when the glass ball was broken by the charge,

"Law-s-s-t!" he drawled when the little sphere sailed away unharmed.

Each shooter on finishing his first string of five, swabbed out his gun, leaned it against the rack, and went to squat in the group where he commented to his friends on his own or others' luck, but always quietly. An air of the strictest business held the entire assembly.

This broke slightly when Mr. Kincaid's name was called. A stir went through the crowd; and some one called out,

"Go it, Old Reliable. Have you had any hoops put around her lately?"

Mr. Kincaid grinned good-naturedly, but made no reply. He had discarded his coat; and now wore a brown cardigan jacket. He took his place with the greatest deliberation, consuming twice as much time as any one else.

"Ready," said he.

"Ready," replied the trapper mechanically.

"Pool!" cried Mr. Kincaid.

The discharge delayed so long that Bobby looked to see if a misfire had occurred; but when the ball reached the exact top of its swing, Mr. Kincaid broke it.

“One of the most reliable duck shots we have,” said Bobby’s neighbour to the stranger. “He shoots just like that, always. Never in a hurry; but he seems to get there. Kills a lot of game in the season.”

The shoot progressed with almost the precision of a machine. Bobby amused himself by closing his eyes to hear the regular *ready, pull, bang!* that marked the progress of the score. From his level with the tops of the brown grasses of late summer he enjoyed the wandering puffs of hot air, the drift of pungent aromatic powder smoke, the rapid successive bending of the stalks as though fairies were running over them when the breezelets passed. It was all very pleasant and, for the time being, he forgot his disappointment.

The match was to be at one-hundred balls — sixty singles, and twenty pairs of doubles. Early in the game the different shooters began roughly to group themselves on the score-cards according to their ability. One class, among whom were Newmark and Kincaid, continued to

break their targets with unvarying accuracy. Young Wellman by rights belonged with these; but he had undershot a strong incomer; and the miss had cost him two others before he could recover his temper. The second class had missed from one to five each. The third class, typified by Mr. Heinzman, had a long string of "goose-eggs" to their discredit.

The fiftieth bird, however, Mr. Kincaid missed. It flipped sideways from the arm of the trap, and flew for twenty feet close to the ground. The referee had actually started to call "no bird"; but Mr. Kincaid elected to try for it; missed; and had to abide by his decision. At the close of the singles, Newmark had a score of sixty straight; Kincaid fifty-nine; and the others strung out variously in the rear.

At this point, a short recess was taken. The crowd of men lit fresh cigars; talked out loud; circulated about; and relaxed generally from the long strain. Some scattered out into the grass to help the trapper to look for unbroken balls. Ordinarily Bobby loved to do this; but to-day he sidled up to where his friend was stooping over the japanned box. Bobby watched him a moment in silence, methodically laying

away the used brass shells, one up and one down in regular succession.

"It's too bad you got beat," he ventured timidly at last.

Mr. Kincaid ceased his occupation, removed his pipe from his mouth, and looked up at Bobby searchingly.

"Youngster," he said kindly, "I'm not beat."

"You're behind," insisted Bobby, "and Newmark never misses."

Mr. Kincaid arose slowly, and without a word took Bobby by the arm and led him around the tree. He stopped and raised Bobby's chin in his gnarled brown hand until the little boy's eyes looked straight into his own. Bobby noticed that the twinkle had — not disappeared — but drawn far back into their gray depths, which had become unaccountably sober.

"Bobby," said Mr. Kincaid gravely, "always remember this, all your life, no matter what happens to you; a man is never defeated until the very last shot is fired."

He paused.

"And remember this, too: that even if he is defeated, he is not beaten, provided he has done the very best he could, and has never lost heart."

He looked a moment longer into Bobby's eyes; and the little boy saw the gray twinkle flickering back to the surface, and the crow's-feet deepening good-naturedly.

"That's all, sonny," he said, and withdrew his hand from Bobby's chin.

"So you want to see me win the rifle, do you?" asked Mr. Kincaid, as they turned away.

"Yes, sir," replied Bobby.

"Why?"

"Because you're a friend of mine," replied Bobby with simple dignity.

"And that's the very best reason in the world!" cried Mr. Kincaid heartily.

The shooting at the doubles began. Two balls were placed in the trap at once — it will be remembered that it was provided with double arms — and thrown in the air together. At this game many good scores fell into disintegration, for it required great quickness of manipulation to catch both before one should reach the ground. Mr. Newmark's snap method here stood him in good stead. When Mr. Kincaid stepped to the trap, the stranger turned to his friend.

"Here's where the old fellow falls down, I'm afraid," said he a trifle regretfully. "He's

too deliberate for this business. I'm sorry. I'd like to see him give Newmark a race for it."

"Deliberate!" snorted the local man.

Mr. Kincaid's preparations were as careful and as wasteful of time as ever. But when he enunciated his famous "pool!" the stranger was treated to a surprise. The first ball was literally snuffed into nothingness before it had risen five feet above the trap! Then quite slowly Mr. Kincaid followed the second to the top of its flight and broke it as though it had been a single.

"Lord!" gasped the visitor. "He surely can't do that with any certainty!"

"Can't he!" said the other grimly, "Watch him."

Interest soon centred on Newmark and Kincaid, as those who had made straight scores on the singles now dropped one or more. Both the contestants named broke their nine pair straight. Bobby sent strong little waves of hope for a miss after each of Mr. Newmark's targets, but without avail. Only one pair apiece remained to be shot at; and in order that Mr. Kincaid should win the match, it would be necessary that Newmark should miss both. This was inconceivable. Bobby threw himself

face downward in the grass, sick at heart. He made up his mind he would not look. Nevertheless when, Mr. Newmark's name was called, he sat up.

"Pull!" came Mr. Newmark's dry, incisive voice.

The balls sprang into the air. A sharp *click* followed. Evidently a misfire. The referee, imperturbable, stepped forward to examine the shell. He found the primer well indented; so, in accordance with the rules, he announced:

"No bird!"

Mr. Newmark's reloaded.

"Pull!" he called again.

On the first bird he scored his first miss of the day.

"Misfire threw him off," exclaimed the spectators afterward.

And then, curiously enough, a queer current of air, springing from nowhere, utterly abnormal, seized the dense powder smoke and whirled it backward, completely enveloping the shooter. The obscuration was momentary, but complete. By the time it had passed the second ball had fallen almost to the ground. Newmark snapped hastily at it.

"Lost! Lost!" announced the scorer.

A deep sigh of emotion swept over the crowd. Bobby gripped his hands so tightly that the knuckles turned white. He resented the intervention of a half-dozen other contestants before Mr. Kincaid should be called; and rolled about in an agony of impatience until his friend stepped to the mark.

The men unconsciously straightened and removed the cigars from their lips. Two hits would win; one miss would tie. Bobby stood up, his breath coming and going rapidly, his sight a little blurred. But Mr. Kincaid went through his motions of preparation, and broke the two balls, with no more haste or excitement than if they had been the first two of the match.

A cheer broke out. Others were still to shoot, but this decided the winner.

"Congratulations!" said Newmark dryly as his rival stepped from the mark.

"That's all right," replied Kincaid, "but it was sheer rank hard luck for you."

On the way home just about sunset many teams passed the old white horse with his old yellow cart, and his driver hunched comfortably over the reins. Everybody shouted final chaffing, kindly congratulations as they sped by.

Bobby, hunched alongside in loyal imitation

of his companion's attitude, glowed through and through.

"My! I'm glad you won!" he repeated again and again.

Kincaid looked straight ahead of him, his gray eyes pensive, the short pipe shifted to the corner of his mouth. Finally he glanced down amusedly at his ecstatic companion.

"You see, Bobby?" he said, "—until the last shot is fired."

VIII

THE FLOBERT RIFLE

Thus Bobby had passed through the extremes of hope, of anticipation, of disappointment and of despair. The Flobert Rifle on which he had set his heart, which he had firmly made up his mind to buy as soon as he could save up enough on an allowance of one cent a day, had been withdrawn from sale and offered as prize for the fall trap shooting. This had been a severe blow, but from it Bobby had finally rallied. His father would participate in the shoot; his father was omnipotent and invincible. After winning the Flobert Rifle, he would undoubtedly give it to Bobby. Then, just before the shoot Mr. Orde had been called west on business. Bobby had been vouchsafed only the melancholy satisfaction of seeing Mr. Kincaid, whom he liked, win out over Mr. Newmark, whom he disliked. The rifle was in good hands; that was all any one could say about it.

But one afternoon, returning home about two

o'clock, he was surprised to find Bucephalus and the yellow cart hitched out in front, and Mr. Kincaid sitting on the porch steps.

"No one home but the girl; so I thought I'd wait," he explained, shaking hands with Bobby very gravely. "I brought around the new rifle," he added further. "What do you say to driving up over the hill somewhere and trying her?"

They drove slowly up the road of planks that gave footing over the sand-hills. The new shiny Flobert Rifle with its gold-plated locks and trigger guards rested between Mr. Kincaid's knees. He would not permit Bobby to touch it, however.

When the old white horse had struggled over the grade and into the stump-dotted country, Mr. Kincaid hitched him to the fence, and, followed closely by the excited Bobby, climbed into a field. From his pocket, quite deliberately, he produced a small paper target and a dozen tacks wrapped in a bit of paper.

"We'll just nail her up against this big stub," he said to Bobby, tacking away with the handle of his heavy pocket-knife; "and then you can get a rest over that little fellow there."

He stepped back.

"Now let's see you open her," he said, handing over the rifle.

Bobby had long since acquired a theoretical familiarity with the mechanism. He cocked the arm and pulled back the breech block, thus opening the breech with its broken effect due to the springing of the ejector.

"That's all right," approved Mr. Kincaid, pausing in the filling of his pipe, "but you have the muzzle pointing straight at Duke."

"It isn't loaded," objected Bobby.

"A man who knows how to handle a gun," said Mr. Kincaid emphasizing his words impressively with the stem of his pipe, "never in any circumstances lets the muzzle of his gun, loaded or unloaded, for even a single instant, point toward any living creature he does not wish to kill. Remember that, Bobby. When you've learned that, you've learned a good half of gun-handling."

"Yes, sir," said Bobby.

"Keep the muzzle up," finished Mr. Kincaid, "and then you're all right."

He led the way to the smaller stump; and nonchalantly, as though it were not one of the most wonderful affairs in the world to own such a thing, produced a little square red box con-

taining the cartridges. This he opened. Bobby gazed with the keenest pleasure on the orderly rows of alternate copper and lead dots.

"Now," said Mr. Kincaid, "kneel down behind the stump." He rested the rifle across it. "You know how to sight, don't you? I thought likely. When you pull the trigger, try to pull it steadily, without jerking. Get in here, Duke!"

Bobby knelt, and assumed a position to shoot. To his surprise he found that his heart was beating very fast, and that his breath came and went as rapidly as though he had just climbed a hill. He tried desperately to hold the front sight in the notch of the hind sight, and both on the black bull's eye. It was surprisingly difficult, considering the simplicity of the theory. Finally he pulled the trigger for the first time in his life.

"Snap!" said the rifle.

"Now let's see where you hit!" suggested Mr. Kincaid.

Bobby started up eagerly; remembered; and with great care laid the Flobert, muzzle up, against the stump.

"That's right," approved Mr. Kincaid.

The bullet had penetrated the exact centre of the bull's eye!

"My!" cried Bobby delighted. "That was a pretty good shot, wasn't it, Mr. Kincaid? That was doing pretty well for the first time, wasn't it?"

But Mr. Kincaid was lighting his pipe, and seemed quite unimpressed.

"Bullet went straight (*puff, puff*)," said he. "That's all you can say (*puff, puff*). No *one* shot's a good shot (*puff, puff*). Take's two to prove it (*puff, puff*)."

He straightened his head and threw the match away.

"It's too good, Bobby, to be anything but an accident," said he kindly. "Now come and try again."

Bobby was permitted to fire nine more shots, of which three hit the paper, and none came near the bull's eye. He could not understand this; for with the dead rest across the stump, he thought he was holding the sights against the black. Mr. Kincaid watched him amusedly. The small figure crouched over the stump was so ridiculously in earnest. At the tenth shot he put the cover on the box of ammunition.

"Aren't we going to shoot any more?" cried Bobby, disappointed.

"Enough's enough," said Mr. Kincaid.

"Ten shots is practice. More's just fooling — at first, anyway. You can't expect to become a good shot in an afternoon. If you could, why, where's the glory of being a good shot?"

"I don't see what made me miss," speculated Bobby.

"I think I could tell you," replied Mr. Kincaid, "but I'm not going to. You think it over; and next time see if you can tell me. That's the way to learn."

"Next time!" cried Bobby, his interest reviving.

"You aren't tired of it, are you?" enquired Mr. Kincaid with mock anxiety. "Because I've got ninety cartridges left here that I wouldn't know what to do with."

"Oh!" cried Bobby.

"Well, then," proposed Mr. Kincaid, "I'll tell you what we'll do. You and I will organize the — well, the Maple County Sportsman's Association, say; and we'll hold weekly shoots. These will be the grounds. You and I will be the charter members; but we'll let in others, if we happen to want to."

"Papa," breathed Bobby

"Moved and seconded that Mr. John Orde, alias Papa, be elected. Motion carried," said

Mr. Kincaid. "I'll be President," he continued. "I've always wanted to be president of something; and you can be secretary. You must get a little blank book, and rule it off for the scores. Then maybe by and by we'll have a prize, or something. What do you think?"

Bobby said what he thought.

"Now," said Mr. Kincaid, opening the wooden box that ran along the floor of the two-wheeled cart where the dashboard, had there been one, would have been placed, "this is the next thing: when you're through shooting, clean the gun. If you leave it over night, the powder dirt will make a fine rust that you may never be able to get out; and rust will eat into the rifling and make the gun inaccurate. No matter how late it is, or how tired you are, *always clean your gun* before you go to bed. It's the second most important thing I can teach you. You'll see lots of men who can kill game, perhaps, but remember this; the fellow who lets his gun point toward no living thing but his game, and who keeps it bright and clean, is further along toward being a true sportsman — even if he is a very poor shot — than the careless man who can hit them."

He gave Bobby the steel wire cleaning-rod,

the rags, and the oil can, and showed him how to get all the powder residue from the rifling grooves in the barrel.

"There," said Mr. Kincaid, folding back the half-seat, "climb in. That settles it for to-day."

Bucephalus came to with reluctance. Going down hill he settled into a slow steady jog, which soon covered the distance to the Orde house. Bobby climbed out and turned to utter thanks.

"That's all right," said Mr. Kincaid. "Next time I'm going to shoot, myself; and you'll have to rustle to beat me. Don't forget the score book."

"When will it be?" asked Bobby.

"Oh, Thursday again," replied Mr. Kincaid. He disengaged the Flobert from between his knees. "Here," said he; "you take this and put it away carefully. I'll keep the ammunition," he added with a grim smile. "Remember not to snap it. Snapping's bad for it when it is empty. Good-bye."

He drove off down the street beneath the over-arching maples, the old white horse jogging sleepily, the old yellow cart lurching. Over his shoulder floated puffs of smoke from his pipe.

Bobby carried the new rifle into the house,

ascended to his own room, and sat down to enjoy it to its smallest detail. The heavy blued octagon barrel bore an inscription which he deciphered — the maker's name, and the patents under which the arm was manufactured. He examined the sights, and how they were fastened to the barrel; the fall of the hammer; the firing-pin; the mechanism of the ejector, the butt plate, the polished stock and the manner in which it was attached to the barrel. Over the fancy scroll of the gold-plated trigger-guard he passed his fingers lovingly. The trigger-guard extended back along the grip of the stock in a long thin metal strip — also gold-plated. It, too, bore an inscription. Bobby read it once without taking in its meaning; a second time with growing excitement. Then he rushed madly through the house shrieking for his mother.

“Mamma, Mamma!” he cried. “Where are you? Come here!”

Mrs. Orde came — on the run — likewise the cook, and the butcher. They found Bobby dancing wildly around and around, hugging close to his heart the Flobert rifle.

“Bobby, Bobby!” cried Mrs. Orde. “What is it? What's the matter? Are you hurt?”

She caught sight of the gun, leaped to the

conclusion that Bobby had shot himself and sank limply into a chair.

“See! Look here!” cried Bobby. He thrust the rifle, bottom up into her lap. “Read it!”

On the plate behind the trigger-guard, carved in flowing script, were these words.

To Robert Orde from Arthur Kincaid. September 10, 1879.

IX

MR. DAGGETT

The printing press, too, was now a success. What time Bobby could spare, he spent over his new work. In fact he would probably have printed out all his interest in the shape of cards for friends and relatives, did not an incident spur his failing enthusiasm. The little tin box of printer's ink went empty. Bobby tried to buy more at Smith's where other kinds of ink were to be had. Mr. Smith had none.

"You'd better go over to Mr. Daggett's," he advised. "He'll let you have some."

Bobby crossed the street, climbed a stairway slanting outside a square wooden store building and for the first time found himself in a printing office.

Tall stands held tier after tier of type-cases, slid in like drawers. The tops were slanted. On them stood other cases, their queerly arranged and various-sized compartments exposed to view. Down the centre of the room

ran a long table. One end of it was heaped with printed matter in piles and in packages, the other was topped with smooth stone on which rested forms made up. Shelves filled with stationery, cans and the like ran down one side the room. Beyond the table were two presses, a big and a little. In one corner stood a table with a gas jet over it. In another was an open sink with running water. A thin man in dirty shirt-sleeves was setting type from one of the cases. Another, shorter man at the stone-topped table was tapping lightly with a mallet on a piece of wood which he moved here and there over a form. A boy of fifteen was printing at the smaller of the presses. A huge figure was sprawled over the table in the corner. In the air hung the delicious smell of printer's ink and the clank and chug of the press.

Bobby stood in the doorway some time. Finally the boy said something to the man at the table. The latter looked up, then arose and came forward.

He was of immense frame, but gaunt and caved-in from much stooping and a consumptive tendency. His massive bony shoulders hung forward; his head was carried in advance. In character this head was like that of a Jove

condemned through centuries to long hours in a dark, unwholesome atmosphere — the grand, square, bony structure, the thick, upstanding hair, the bushy, steady eyebrows, the heavy beard. But the cheeks beneath the beard were sunken; the eyes in the square-cut caverns were kind and gentle — and very weary.

“I want to see if I can get some ink of you,” requested Bobby, holding out his little tin box.

Mr. Daggett took the box without replying; and, opening it, tested with his finger the quality and colour of what it had contained.

“I guess so,” said he.

He led the way to one of the shelves and opened a can as big as a bucket. Bobby gasped.

“My!” he cried; “will you ever use all that?”

Mr. Daggett nodded, and, dipping a broad-bladed knife, brought up, on merely its point, enough to fill Bobby’s tin box.

“How much is it?” asked Bobby.

“Let’s see, you’re Jack Orde’s little boy, aren’t you?” asked Daggett.

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, that’s all right, then. It’s nothing.”

“Oh, thank you!” cried Bobby, overwhelmed.

The man nodded his massive head. "Please," ventured Bobby, hesitating, "please, would you mind if I stay a little while and watch?"

"'Course not," assured Mr. Daggett. "Stay as long as you want."

He returned to his table and forgot the little boy. An hour later he looked up. Bobby was still there standing in the middle of the floor, staring with all his might. Mr. Daggett pulled together his great frame and arose.

"Have you a printing press?" he asked Bobby.

"Yes, sir," replied Bobby — "it's only a little one — to print two lines," he added.

"Do you like printing?"

"Oh!" burst out Bobby enthusiastically, "it's more fun than anything!"

"I'd like to see some of your work," said Mr. Daggett a flash of amusement flickering in his deep eyes.

Bobby felt in his pocket and gravely presented a card.

"Mr. Robert Orde.

Job Printer."

"Why," said Mr. Daggett, surprised, "this is pretty well done. I didn't know you could make ready so well on those little presses."

"What's 'make ready'?" asked Bobby.

"Why, regulating the impression so that all the letters are printed evenly."

"They didn't for a long time," sighed Bobby "I had lots of trouble."

"How did you make it go?" asked Mr. Daggett, interested.

Bobby explained the pasting of the slips of paper.

"Who taught you that?" asked Mr. Daggett sharply.

"Nobody; I just thought of it."

Two hours later, when the noon whistles blew, Bobby said good-bye to his friend after a most interesting morning. Mr. Daggett had showed him everything. He explained how in the type-cases the capital letters occupied little compartments all alike and at the top, but how the small letters were arranged arbitrarily in various-sized compartments.

"You see," said he, "we use the *e* oftenest, so that is the largest and is right in the middle. And here is the *a* near it, but a little smaller. A man has to learn where they are."

Then they watched the compositor setting type in the metal "stick" with the sliding end. The compositor showed Bobby how he could

tell when the letters were right side up by feeling the nicks in the type, without the necessity of looking; how he used the leads to space between the lines. His hands flew from one compartment of the type case to the other and the type clicked sharply. In a moment the stick was full. All three walked over to the "composing table" of stone. Here Bobby watched the type placed in the huge iron frame, which was then filled in with the wooden blocks. The wedge-shaped irons locked it. Finally the block and mallet went over the whole surface to even it down.

Bobby saw proof taken. He watched the small press in operation. It was worked by a foot lever. The round ink plate which automatically made a quarter turn at each impression and the double automatic ink-rollers were a revelation to him. All the boy had to do was to insert and withdraw the paper and push down with his foot. And the pressure was so exact and so delicate and so brief — as though the type and the platen coquetted without actually touching; and the imprint was so true and clear! Even on the thin paper, the shape of the type did not stamp through!

He could have watched for an hour, but

shortly the job was finished, so he moved on to look at the coloured inks and the fascinating variety of papers and cards and envelopes,

This latter occupation kept him busy for a long time. He had not realized that so many shapes and kinds of letters could exist. Mr. Daggett told him their names and sizes — nonpareil, brevier, agate, pica, minion and a dozen others which Bobby could not remember but which he found exotic and attractive. Especially was he interested in the poster type, made of wood. One letter was bigger than the whole form of his little press.

When he left, Mr. Daggett gave him a small heavy package.

“Here you are,” said he. “Here’s an old font of script. It’s old and too worn for my use, but you can fool with it.”

Bobby was delighted. He could hardly wait to get home before undoing the package. The font formed a compact quadrilateral wound around the edges with string. The letters were all arranged in order — four capital A’s — A A A A — then the Bs, and so on. It differed from his own font. The one that came with his press had just three of each letter — large or

small. This varied. For instance, there were twenty *ss*, and only two *qs*. Bobby procured his ~~two~~ezers and began to set up his own name. He had no stick so he got out the form with the two narrow wooden grooves. To his dismay the type would not fit. They were at least a quarter inch longer than his own.

"Why so solemn, Bobby?" enquired his father at lunch a few minutes later. "What's wrong?"

"My printing press isn't a real one," broke out Bobby. "It's a *toy* one! I don't *like* toys!"

"Oh, ho!" cried Mr. Orde. "Don't like toys, eh! How about the engine and cars, and the tin soldiers?"

"I don't like them any more, either," insisted Bobby stoutly.

"All right," suggested Mr. Orde, winking at his wife. "Of course then you won't want them any more: I'll just give them away to some other little boy."

"All right," assented Bobby with genuine and astonishing indifference.

Bobby laid the little press away, but he could not resist the fascination of Mr. Daggett's printing office. One day he came from it

bearing an inky and much-thumbed catalogue. He fairly learned it by heart — not only the machines, from the tiny card press to the beautiful fifty-dollar self-inker beyond which his ambition did not stray, but also all the little accessories of the trade — the mallet, the patent quoins, the sticks, the type-cases, the composing stones, the roller moulds and compositions, the patent gauge-pins, the lead-cutters, the slugs. And page after page he ran over the type in all its sizes and in all its modifications of form. These things fascinated him and held him with a longing for them, like revolvers and razors and carpenter's chisels and peavies and all other business-like tools of a trade. Their very shapes were the most appropriate and romantic shapes they could possibly have assumed. He made lists. At first they were elaborate, and included the big foot press and four fonts of type and three colours of ink and fixings innumerable. They then shrank modestly by gradations until they stuck at the 5 x 7 form. Bobby would not have cared for a press smaller than that, for he wanted to print real things, like bill-heads and whist cards and perhaps a small newspaper. His little heart throbbed with a complete enthusiasm.

“When I grow up I think I’d like to be a printer like Mr. Daggett,” he said wistfully.

“Oh, no, you wouldn’t,” said Mr. Orde. “It’s a poor trade — no money in it here — and you’d have to stay in the house all the time. You wouldn’t want to be a printer, Bobby.”

“Yes I would,” repeated Bobby positively.

X

THE SPORTSMAN'S ASSOCIATION

The Maple County Sportsman's Association held its weekly shoots with regularity. It consumed a great deal of Bobby's time and attention. You see, each event was to be anticipated, and then remembered; the score was to be rejoiced over or regretted; and the great question of how to do better was to be considered prayerfully and long. Bobby found it to be a more complicated problem than he would have believed possible. He used to lie awake in bed thinking it over. Regularly before Thursday came around he hit on a complete solution of the difficulty; and as regularly he discovered by the actual test that something, whether of theory or practice, still lacked.

Mr. Kincaid always listened to his ideas non-committally.

"I've found out what it is!" cried Bobby as soon as Bucephalus had approached within

hearing distance. "You got to practise until your forefinger works all by itself — entirely separate from the rest of your arm. Then the rifle won't jerk sideways so much."

"All right," Mr. Kincaid responded, as Bobby climbed laboriously into the cart. "Try it."

Bobby tried it; found it difficult to accomplish, and not altogether effective. The bullets still scattered more or less like a shot-gun charge. Mr. Kincaid's score more than doubled his. Mr. Kincaid always shot the best he could; and entered a grave negative to Bobby's tentative suggestion for a handicap.

"No, Bobby," said he, "don't believe in 'em. It really doesn't matter whether you defeat me or not; now does it? But it does matter whether you get to be a good enough shot to win."

After each demolition of his ideas, Bobby returned a trifle dashed, but with undaunted spirit. Again his busy brain attacked the puzzle. In a week he had another hypothesis ready for the test.

Thus he edged slowly but surely toward marksmanship. The sight must be held on the mark for an instant after the discharge; the

trigger must be squeezed steadily, not pulled; the independent command of the forefinger is helped by as inclusive a grasp of the stock as possible; holding the breath is an aid to steadiness — these, and a dozen other first principles, Bobby acquired, one after another, by the slow inductive process. Each helped; and Mr. Kincaid appreciated that his pupil was learning intelligently, so that in the final result Bobby would not only be a good shot, but he would know why.

In the meantime various changes were taking place in the seasons, which Bobby noted in his own fashion. The little green apples of summer — just right for throwing and for casting from the end of a switch — were now large and rosy. Under the big hickory tree in the Fuller's yard were already to be found occasional nuts. The leaves were turning gorgeous; and enough were falling to make it necessary that the householder search out his broad rake. In the country the shocks of corn stood in rows like so many Indian chiefs wrapped each in his blanket, his plumes waving above. The night was weird with the notes of birds migrating.

To each of these things Bobby, like every other boy in town, gave his attention. Apples

and grapes there were everywhere in abundance. The early pioneer planted always his orchard and his arbours. The town, taking root on the old riverside farms, preserved, as far as it could, the fruit-trees. Every one who had a yard of any size about his house, possessed also an apple tree or so and a grape vine — sometimes a chance peach or pear. Bobby could not go amiss for fresh fruit; but he liked best of all the sweet little red “Delawares” that grew back of Auntie Kate’s kitchen garden. These he picked, warmed by the sun. The satiny “Concords” from the trellis, however, were better dipped in cool water, which, with some labour, he caused to gush sparkling from an old-fashioned wooden pump. Auntie Kate’s apple trees, too, were of selected varieties. Early in the season were the soft yellow sweetings; then the streaked red and green “Northern Spies”; and last of all the snow-apples with their contrast of deep crimson outside and white flesh within. The windfalls covered the ground ready to the hand; and the branches bent under their burden. It was the season of apple-sauce with cinnamon, and baked apples with a dab of jelly where the core ought to be, and apple-tapioca and Brown Betty.

And these tasted wondrous good, even to youngsters already gorged with raw fruit.

In every front yard and along every street front the householders were busy raking the crisp autumn leaves into great heaps and long piles. Bobby and his friends liked solemnly to "swish" their little legs through them; to roll in them; to hide beneath them by burrowing like so many squirrels. If this was the season of fruit, it was also the season of bonfires. Every one burned leaves in those days, blissfully unconscious of future city ordinances. A thin sweet haze of smoke hung constantly in the air mellowing the blue of the sky, softening the outlines of the hills, aromatic as an incensed cathedral. In the evenings the fires winked bravely on both sides the streets. Figures with rakes were silhouetted against them. Smaller figures careered wildly in and out the dense smoke. It was a great "dare" to run and jump directly through the fire! Now the sun was getting lazy; and sometimes Bobby was allowed the indulgence of a half-hour of this delicious wild fun. He always came in smoky and overheated; and always Mrs. Orde vowed that it should not happen again. it did.

Then there were the hickory nuts to be

gathered in pails and sacks and spread out on the garret floor to cure. Unfortunately the hickory tree was very tall, so the boys had patiently to await the pleasure of the wind. Walnuts and butternuts, on the contrary, were to be knocked down with well-aimed clubs; hazelnuts to be stripped from the bushes; and beech-nuts to be shaken down by a bold and practised climber. And in the woods the squirrels were busy laying away their winter stores.

Mr. Kincaid and Bobby were often afield on the beech ridges. Mr. Kincaid carried his gun, but he did not use it. They looked for squirrels. The woods were carpeted with dead leaves on which the sun lay golden. They had to move very quietly and keep a very sharp lookout. When the game was sighted, the matter was by no means resolved. Squirrels are lively people, and expert at hiding. Bobby and Mr. Kincaid chased hard and breathlessly to force their quarry up a tree. When that was accomplished, it was by no means easy to get a shot. The squirrel leaped from one tree to another as fast as his enemies below could run. Finally he climbed to the top of a tall beech whose trunk he immediately put between him-

self and the hunters. It became necessary first to see him, second to get a shot at him, third to hit him, and last to bring him down. Bobby, shooting the heavy barrelled Flobert at unaccustomed ranges, and at an elusive mark, discovered the appetite of atmosphere for lead. Nevertheless it was the most exciting, breathless, tingling game he had ever played. The air was biting cold, especially after the sun began to sink through the trees, but it had the effect merely of nipping Bobby's nose and cheeks red — his little body was tingling and aglow. On his banner day he brought down two fox-squirrels, and one of the beautiful black squirrels, then not uncommon, but now practically extinct. In the process he used up his box of cartridges.

XI

THE MARSHES

“Real fall weather,” that season of 1879, seemed to delay long beyond the appointed time. During each night, to be sure, it grew cold. The leaves, after their blaze and riot of colour, turned crisp and crackly and brown. Some of the little still puddles were filmed with what was almost, but not quite, ice. A sheen of frost whitened the house-roofs and silvered each separate blade of grass on the lawns. But by noon the sun, rising red in the veil of smoke that hung low in the snappy air, had mellowed the atmosphere until it lay on the cheek like a caress. No breath of air stirred. Sounds came clearly from a distance. Long V-shaped flights of geese swept athwart the sky very high up, but their honking carried faintly to the ear. Time seemed to have run down. And yet when the sun, swollen to the great dimensions of the rising moon, dipped blood-red through the haze, the first faint premonitory

tingle of cold warned one that the tepid, grateful warmth of the day had been but an illusion of a season that had gone. This was not summer; but, in the quaint old phrase, Indian summer. And its end would be as though the necromancer had waved his wand.

In the meantime the barges and schooners continued to take chances in order to market the last of the year's lumber crop; the small boys and squirrels made the most of the nut crop; the grouse remained scattered in noisy cover; and the ducks frequented the open stretches where they were quite out of reach.

But at last Bobby Orde, awakening early, heard the rising and falling moan of wind past the eaves' corner outside his windows. He hopped out of bed, thrust his feet into a pair of knit socks and ran to the window. The sun was not yet up; but the wild barbaric gold of it was flung abroad over flat, hard-looking clouds.

*“Bright sunrise at morning,
The sailor takes warning;”*

murmured Bobby.

In the yard below, the brown leaves were chasing themselves madly around and about, back and forth, like restless spirits. Others

slanted down from the trees in continuous flocks. The maples tossed restlessly. In the air was a deep bitter chill which sent Bobby scurrying back to his warm nest in a hurry.

After breakfast he was glad of his heavier suit. The sun rose and shone, it is true; but its rays possessed no warmth. The light of it appeared to be a cold silver, like the sheen on stubble. All the landscape seemed to have paled. Gone were the rich glowing reds, the warm browns. A gray cast hung over the land.

From school Bobby hurried home to be in time for an early lunch as Mr. Orde wanted to go up river. He found Bucephalus in front; and Mr. Kincaid about to sit down to the lunch table. The latter had on his old gray suit and cardigan jacket.

"Hullo, youngster!" he greeted Bobby, "Looks like pretty good weather for ducks. Want to go for a shoot?"

That settled lunch for Bobby. He could hardly stay at table until the others had finished; and heard with enraptured joy his mother's voice, as she rose from the table, asking Mr. Kincaid about provisions.

"I have all that," replied Mr. Kincaid, "and there's lots of bedding and such things."

Nevertheless Mrs. Orde slipped away after a moment to wrap up a loaf of "salt-rising bread," and one of "dutch bread." The two wheeled cart Bobby found, when finally he and Mr. Kincaid emerged from the house carrying his valise, to be well packed with the shell-box, gun, bag and a lunch basket. Mr Kincaid's duck-dog, named Curly, lay crouched in the bottom like a soft warm mat. Bobby had met Curly before. He was a comical seal-brown dog, covered with compact tight curls all over his body. When Bobby petted him, they felt springy. His face, head and ears, however, were smooth and silky. He had yellow eyes, and an engaging disposition. To the touch his body, even through the tight curls, felt unusually warm. Though Curly's tail was a mere stump he wagged it energetically when his master appeared, but without raising his nose from between his forepaws.

Duke pranced out, eager to go, but was called back by Mrs. Orde and ignominiously held. Bucephalus got under way. Bobby hugged the cold barrel of his little rifle between his knees. He had on his "pull-down" cap, and his shortest and heaviest cloth over-jacket, and knit woollen mittens. The actual temper-

ature was not as yet very low, but the wind from the Lake was abroad, and growing in strength every minute. From the flag-pole of the Ottawa they could see the square red storm-flag with the black centre standing out like a piece of tin.

Bucephalus made surprising time. His gait on the open road was a long awkward shamble, but it seemed to cover the ground. Mr. Kincaid humped his shoulders and drove in a sociable silence, his short pipe empty between his teeth. Curly retained his flattened attitude on the bottom of the cart; only occasionally rolling up his yellow eyes, but without moving his head. The wind tore by them madly.

About half a mile beyond the last mill Mr. Kincaid left the main road to turn sharp to the right directly across the broad marshes. Here a makeshift road had been constructed of poles laid in the corduroy fashion. The cart pitched and bounced along at a foot pace. Bobby had no chance to look about him, and could see only that on both sides stretched the wide cat-tails and rush flats; that near them was water. The sun was setting cold and black in hard greasy-looking clouds.

By and by the cart gave one last bump and

rose to a little dry knoll like an island in the marshes. Bobby saw that on it grew two elm trees, beneath which stood a rough shed. Beyond a fringe of bushes he could make out the roof of another small structure. Mr. Kincaid stopped at the shed, and began to unharness Bucephalus. Bobby descended very stiffly. Curly hopped out and expressed delight over his arrival by wagging himself from the fifth rib back. You see he had not tail enough for the job, so he had to wag part of his body too. In a moment or so Bucephalus was tied in the shed and supplied with oats from a bag.

"Well, we're here," said Mr. Kincaid, picking up one of the valises and the lunch basket. "Bobby, you carry the guns."

He led the way through the bushes to the other structure

It was a cabin of boards, long and narrow, about the size and shape of a freight car. The upper end of it rested on dry land, but the lower end gave out on a floating platform. A single window in the side and a stove pipe through the roof completed the external features.

"Door's around in front," explained Mr. Kincaid.

They descended to the float. The door was

fastened by a padlock. When it was opened Bobby saw at first nothing but blackness and the flat board prow of a duck-boat that seemed to occupy all available space. Mr. Kincaid, however, lifted this bodily to the float, and, entering, drew aside the curtain to the little window.

Bobby stood in the middle of the floor and gazed about him with unbounded delight. The place contained two bunks, one over the other, a small round iron stove, a shelf table against one wall, and two folding stools. From nails hung a frying pan, a coffee pot, and two kettles. Shelves supported a number of cans, while two or three small bags depended from the ceiling. Those were its main furnishings. But beneath the bunks and piled in one corner were many painted wooden ducks. Around the neck of each was wound a long white cord to the end of which was attached a leaden iron weight; in the bunks themselves lay powder canisters, shotbags, wad-boxes. At one end of the table was fastened a crimper and a loading block. Several old pipes lay about. Burned matches strewed the floor.

“Well, here we are, Bobby,” repeated Mr. Kincaid, dropping the valises in the corner,

"and it's pretty near sunset; so I guess we'll organize our boat first, while it's daylight."

He descended to the float.

"Now, you hand me down the decoys," said he.

Bobby passed out the wooden ducks two by two, and Mr. Kincaid stowed them carefully amidships. They were of many sorts and sizes, and Mr. Kincaid named them to Bobby as he received them.

"These are the boys!" said he. "Good old green-heads, Worth all the other ducks put together. Their celery-fed canvasbacks may be better — never had a chance to try them — but the canvasback in this country can't touch the mallards. And here, these are blue-bill. They come to a decoy almost too easy. This is a teal — fly like thunder and are about as big as a grasshopper. We'll make our flock mostly of these. Those widgeon, there, wouldn't do us much good. Might put in a few sprig. They're a handsome duck, Bobby; but the most beautiful thing in feathers is the wood-duck. Probably won't get any of them to-morrow, though."

Bobby worked eagerly. Soon he was in a

warm glow, the cold wind forgotten, his cheeks like snow-apples, his eyes like stars.

"That's just a hundred," counted Mr. Kincaid, "and its a humming good boat load. It'll do. Now you take this demijohn and fill it from the spring-hole you'll find back of the house, and I'll get the shell-box."

The equipment was finally completed by two wooden shell-boxes to sit on, a short broad paddle and a long punting pole.

By now the sun had dipped below the horizon leaving nothing of its glory in the low-hung, hard clouds. All the world seemed clad in velvet-gray, with dark soft shadows. A gleam of light reflected from water as it showed in patches here and there. It matched and continued the pale green light of the heavens, as though the sky had flowed down and through the blackness of the marshes. The wind came now in heavy gusts, succeeded by intervals of comparative calm. During these intervals could be heard the cries of innumerable wildfowl.

Bobby stood at the end of the float, absolutely motionless, taking it in. His intellectual faculties were as though non-existent. All the sensitiveness of his nature, like the sensitiveness of a photographic plate, was exposed

to that which took place before him. No little detail of the scene would he ever forget; and nothing of what its vastness and mystery and turmoil signified in the world of further meanings would be lost to him, though for many years he would not understand them.

But now, as the darkness of the shadows deepened, and the light of water and sky took on a deeper lucence before being extinguished, for the first time the sense of pain and the incompleteness of beautiful things entered his heart. The thing was wonderful; but it hurt. The sight of it filled him to the lips with a passion of uplift; and yet something lacked. And the lack of that something was a pain.

Bobby had forgotten that he was cold, that he was alone, that he had come on an exciting and novel expedition. Mr. Kincaid had disappeared within the cabin.

A whistle of wings rushed in on the boy's consciousness with startling suddenness. Across the face of the evening indeterminate, dark bodies darted low. A prolonged swish of water sounded, and the placid faint light on the lagoon fifty yards away was broken and troubled. For a moment it shimmered, and was still. Absolute darkness seemed

abruptly to descend on all the world. From the blackness Bobby heard the low conversational sounds of ducks newly alit.

“*Ca-chuck!*” said they “*ca-tu-kuk!*” and then an old drake lifted up his voice.

“*Mark!*” said he. “*Mark-quok, quok, quok!*”

“Oh, Mr. Kincaid!” whispered Bobby sneaking quietly through the door. “There’s a great big flock of ducks lit just outside.”

“That so?” queried Mr. Kincaid cheerfully in his natural voice, “Well, we’ll get after ’em in the morning. Don’t you want any supper?”

Mr. Kincaid had a fire going in the little round stove. The light that leaked from it wavered and flickered over the bunks and the table shelves, and the diminished pile of decoys. Curly was asleep in the corner. Every few moments Mr. Kincaid removed the frying pan from the top of the stove, and turned over its contents with a fork. At such times the light flared up brilliantly, illuminating the whole upper part of the cabin. A lively sizzling arose from the frying pan; and a delicious smell filled the air. Bobby made out a tea-kettle at the back, and the phantom of light steam issuing from its spout.

In a little while Mr. Kincaid straightened

up and with a clatter slid an iron stove cover over the opening. He lit a candle, stuck it in the mouth of a bottle, and moved down on the table shelf carrying the frying pan. Bobby then saw that the table shelf had been set with two-heavy plates, cutlery, and two granite-ware cups. The salt-rising bread and dutch bread were laid out with a knife beside them. A saucer contained a pat of butter; a bottle, milk; and a plate was heaped with doughnuts.

"Supper's ready," announced Mr. Kincaid cheerfully. "Sit up, Bobby."

The frying pan proved to contain two generous slices of ham; and four eggs fried crisp.

"What's the matter with this for a feast?" cried Mr. Kincaid; "sail in!"

The man and the boy ate, the flickering light between them. Outside howled the wind. Curly slumbered peacefully in the corner.

"This," proffered Mr. Kincaid after an interval, as he reached toward the basket, "is what my grandfather used to call a 'good competent pie.' Like pie, Bobby?"

"Yes, sir," replied Bobby, "but I mustn't eat the under crust."

"Right you are. Well, there's somebody here who'll eat it for you."

“Do you want it?” asked Bobby, wondering. Mr. Kincaid laughed. “No, I mean Curly,” he explained.

“Will Curly eat pie?” marvelled Bobby.

“Curly,” said Mr. Kincaid impressively, “will eat anything you can throw down a hole.”

It was a good pie, with lots of room between the crusts, and cinnamon on the apples, and sugar and nutmeg on top. When finally Mr. Kincaid pushed back his stool, Curly gravely arose and came forward to get his share of whatever had not been eaten.

“Now, dishes!” said Mr. Kincaid. “Will you wash or wipe, Bobby?”

“My, I’m full!” said Bobby in the way of indirect expostulation against immediate activity.

“The time to wash dishes is right away,” said Mr. Kincaid briskly. “They wash easier; and when they’re done you have a comfortable feeling that there’s nothing more to be done — and a clear conscience. Did you ever wash dishes?”

“No, sir.”

“Well, it’s time you learned. Come on.”

Bobby learned how to manipulate hot water, soap, and a dish-rag. Also how difficult it is to remove some sorts of grease.

“Condemned!” pronounced Mr. Kincaid severely, returning him the frying pan.

But when the simple task was done, Bobby felt an unusual glow of competence and experience. He was really “camping out.” A new ambition to learn came to him, an ambition to do his share and to understand other people’s share. Naturally his mind turned first to accustomed things.

“Where’s the wood pile?” he asked Mr. Kincaid. “Can’t I fill the wood-box?”

“It’s just behind the house,” approved Mr. Kincaid.

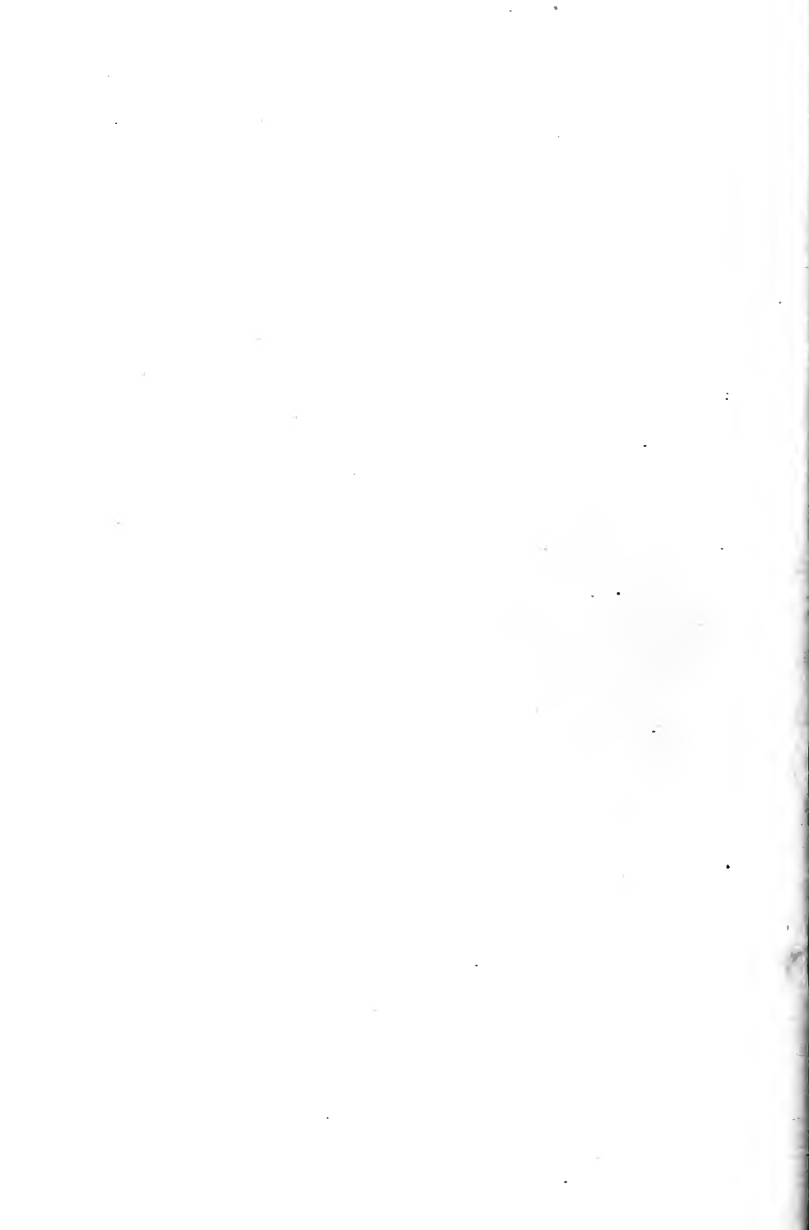
Bobby turned the wooden “button” that fastened the door from the inside. At once it was snatched from his hand and flung open. A burst of wind rioted in, extinguished the candle, flared up the fire in the stove, and hurled a loose paper against the roof.

“Whew!” cried Mr. Kincaid, coming to Bobby’s assistance; “she’s blowing *some!* When you come back, just kick on the door, and I’ll open it for you.”

Bobby stood still a moment until his eyes should expand to the darkness. He heard the repeated and rapid *swish, swish, swish*, of wavelets driven against the float, which rose



"CONDEMNED!" PRONOUNCED MR. KINCAID SEVERELY, RETURNING HIM
THE FRYING-PAN



and fell gently beneath his feet. A roar of wind filled the night. Occasionally it lulled. Then quite distinctly he could make out a faint grumbling diapason which he knew to be the surges beating against the distant coast.

The armful of wood he brought in was not very large, but Mr. Kincaid pronounced it enough.

“And now, youngster,” said he, “you’d better turn in. We’re going to get up very early in the morning.”

For as long as five minutes Bobby lay awake between the soft woollen blankets. This was his first experience without sheets. Mr. Kincaid had blown out the candle, and was sitting back smoking a last pipe. Light from the dying fire in the stove threw his shadow gigantic behind him. As the flames rose or died this shadow advanced or receded, leaped or fell, swelled or diminished; and all the other shadows did likewise. In the entire room Mr. Kincaid’s figure was the only motionless object. Soon Bobby’s vision blurred. The dancing shadows became unreal, changed to dream creatures. Twice a realization, a delicious, poignant realization of the morrow brought him back to consciousness; and the dream creatures to the

shadows. Then finally he drifted away with only the feeling of something pleasant about to happen, lying as a background to sleep.

He awoke in what seemed to him the middle of the night after an absolutely *black* sleep. His first thought was that the broad of his back was shivering; his next that the tip of his nose was marvellous cold; his last that he was curled all up in a ball like a furry raccoon. Then he heard the scratch of a match. A light immediately flickered. In two minutes the little stove was roaring and Mr. Kincaid was exhorting him to arise.

"Come on, now!" he called. "Duck time!"

Bobby dressed in his thickest winter clothes, which he had brought for the occasion. When, after breakfast, he put on his reefer and over that the canvas coat, he looked and felt like a cocoon.

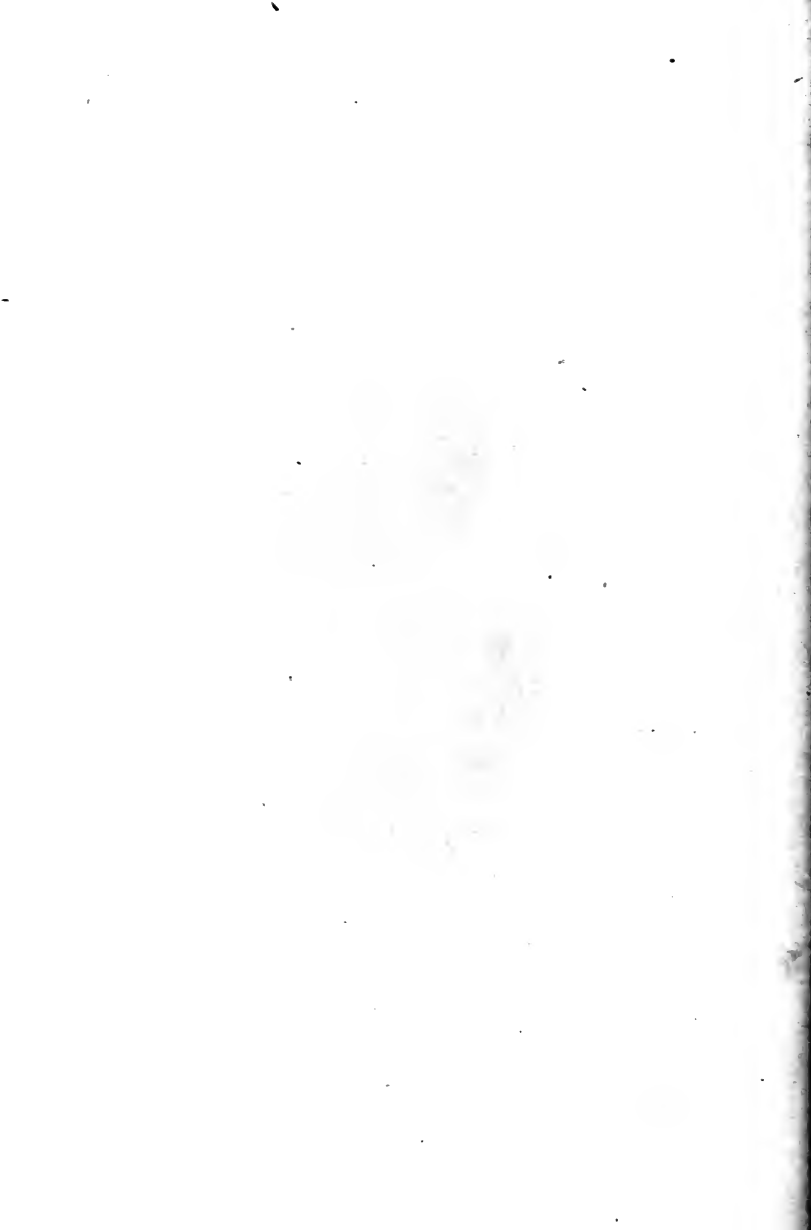
"That's all right," Mr. Kincaid reassured him. "It's going to be cold, and you'll be mighty glad of them."

They stepped out on the float, and Mr. Kincaid thrust the duck-boat into the water.

Bobby had never seen so many stars. The heavens were full of them, and the still water had its share. Not a breath of wind was



THE ARMFUL OF WOOD HE BROUGHT IN WAS NOT VERY LARGE



stirring. Through the silence could be heard more plainly the roar of the surf far away. The quacking of ducks came from near and far. Nothing of the marsh was visible.

Bobby took his place on the shell-box in the bow, his rifle between his knees. Curly, without awaiting command, jumped in and lay at his feet. Mr. Kincaid stepped in aft. Bobby could feel the quiver of the boat as it took the weight, but having been instructed to sit quiet, he did not look around. The craft received an impetus and moved forward. Immediately the breaking of thin scum ice set up a crackling.

"Pretty cold!" said Bobby.

"Don't talk," replied Mr. Kincaid in a guarded voice.

They moved forward in silence. Only the slight crackling at the prow, the soft dip of the paddle, and an occasional breath of effort from the paddler broke the stillness. The motion forward was slow; for the back suction in the shallow, narrow channel, which they almost immediately entered, stopped the boat at the end of each paddle stroke. Bobby was vaguely aware of high reeds or low banks on either side; but he could not see ten feet ahead, and he wondered how Mr. Kincaid could tell where

to go. Shortly the latter put aside his paddle in favour of the punting pole. Bobby, stealing a glance over his shoulder, saw him standing against the sky.

From right and left, in mysterious side lagoons and pockets, came the low quacking and chattering of wildfowl, now close at hand. They were, of course, quite invisible; but their proximity was exciting. Twice the duck-boat approached so close as to alarm them into flight. They arose, then, with a mighty quacking. Bobby could see the silver of broken water where they took wing; but although there seemed to be enough light against the sky, he could not make out the birds themselves. He clasped his rifle close, and shivered with delight, and patted Curly to relieve his feelings.

For a long time, and for a tremendous distance as it seemed to Bobby they crept along through the lagoons and channels of the marshes. The dawn had not come yet, but the air was getting grayer in anticipation of it, and the wind began to blow faintly from the direction of the Lake. Bobby could see the shapes of the grasses and cat-tails, and make out the bodies of water through which they passed. Almost he could catch the flight of ducks as they leaped; and

quite distinctly he saw a flash of teal that passed with a startling rush of wings within a dozen feet of the boat.

And then deliberately the whole universe turned faintly gray, and the smaller stars faded in the lucence of dawn, and the brief, weird world of half-light came into being. At the same moment, Mr. Kincaid turned the boat to the left, forced it by main strength through a thick fringe of reeds, and debouched on a little round pond silvering in the dawn.

The crackling of the duck-boat through the reeds was answered by a roar like the breaking of a great wave. Bobby saw very dimly the rise of hundreds of ducks straight up into the air. The roar of the first leap was immediately succeeded by the whistling of flight.

“My!” breathed Bobby to Curly, “My! My! My!”

But a second roar thundered, as a second and larger flight took wing; and then after an interval a third. The air all around seemed full of ducks circling in and out the limited range of vision before finally taking their departure.

Mr. Kincaid, however, pushed forward without paying the slightest attention to this abundance. Fifteen or twenty yards out in the pond

he brought the boat to a stand-still by thrusting his punting-pole far down into the mud.

"We're here, Bobby," he said in a guarded tone. "Turn around very carefully, take off your mittens and help me put out the decoys."

"My, there's a lot of 'em," ventured Bobby in a whisper.

"Yes, this is called the Mud Hen Hole. It's the best place in the marshes. Quick! Get to work! It's getting near daylight!"

Bobby helped unwind the cords from around the necks of the decoys and drop them overboard. Mr. Kincaid moved the boat here and there, scattering the flock in a life-like manner. The gray daylight was coming stronger every instant. Even while they worked in plain sight, big flocks of teal and blue-bill stooped toward them and whirled around them with a rush of wings.

"They're awful close!" whispered Bobby excitedly, "why don't you shoot?"

"Hurry!" commanded Mr. Kincaid.

When the last decoy was out, he thrust the boat hastily into the thick reeds where already a blind had been constructed quite simply by thickening the natural growth. "Crouch

down!" whispered Mr. Kincaid; "and don't move a muscle!"

Bobby crouched, drawing his head between his shoulders like a mud-turtle. Curly crouched too. Above and around was the continued whistle of wings as the wildfowl, with their strange, early-morning persistence, insisted on returning to the spot whence they had been so lately disturbed. A movement shook the boat as Mr. Kincaid arose to his feet.

Bang! Bang! spoke both barrels of the tennage.

"Two," said Mr. Kincaid in his natural voice.

"Kneel around to face the decoys, Bobby, and you can see. But when I say 'mark,' don't move by a hair's breadth."

Bobby shifted position and found that he could see quite easily through the interstices of the reeds. On the pond, silvered bright by the increasing day, the decoys floated snugly. Even at close range Bobby was surprised at their life-like appearance. Among them floated two ducks, white bellies to the sky. This was all Bobby had time to observe for the moment.

"Mark!" warned Mr. Kincaid behind him.

A tremendous tenseness fell on the world. Bobby's muscles stiffened to the point of aching.

The limited vista bounded on right and left by the sidewise movement of his eyeballs, and above by the brim of his cap contained nothing. He did not dare extend this vista by so much as one inch. But in the air sounded that magic soul-stirring whistle of wings, now gaining in volume until it seemed overhead; now fading until Bobby thought surely the ducks must have become suspicious and left.

And then, low to the reeds across the pond, a long deliberate flight of black bodies against the sky came into sight at the left, slanted across the field of his vision and disappeared to the right. Their wings were set, and every instant Bobby expected to hear the splash of water that should indicate their alighting. But Mr. Kincaid's figure held its immobility. He knew that the wily old mallards were not yet satisfied. Indeed at the last moment, instead of swinging in, they arose with a sudden swift effort, and resumed the slow scrutinizing circle about the pond.

Bobby lived an eternity in the next few moments. His neck muscles grew stiff; his eyeballs strained from a constant attempt to see farther to one side than nature had intended him to see. Each circle he followed visually as far as he could, and then aurally, his hopes

arising and falling as the whistling of the wings sounded near or far. And each circle was lower than its predecessor, until at last the flight swung scarcely twenty feet above the tops of the reeds.

Then, quite unexpectedly to Bobby, and when at its farthest from the blind, the flock turned in and headed directly for him, its wings set.

Bobby caught his breath, and his heart commenced to thump violently. Not a bird of them all seemed to move, and yet with the rush of a railroad train each individual grew in size like magic. It was just like coasting — the same breathless headlong feeling — that quivering avalanche of ducks projected at his head so abruptly and so swiftly that he hardly had time to wink. Nearer and nearer they came, larger and larger they grew. Something inside him seemed to expand like a bubble with their approach; like a bubble too rapidly blown, so that at once, without warning, the bursting point seemed to be reached. Instinctively Bobby shrank back. The moment of collision was imminent. Nothing could stop this headlong flight of living arrows launched against his very face. And then, in a flash, the appearance of the flock changed. As though at a preconcerted signal each duck dropped his legs, threw

back his head, opposed to momentum the breadth of his wings and tail. An indescribable and sudden rushing sound smote the air. The flock, its course arrested, hung motionless above the decoys in the attitude of alighting.

At this precise instant Mr. Kincaid, without haste, smoothly got to his feet. Involuntarily Bobby arose also. Curly, who up to this instant had even kept his yellow eyes closed, put his forepaws on the gunwale, and craned his neck upward the better to see.

Immediately with a mighty beating of wings the ducks "towered." It was almost incredible, the rapidity with which, from a dead stand, they broke into the swiftest flight — and straight up. Bobby could see them plainly, in every detail, the beautiful iridescent green heads of the drakes, stretched eagerly upward, the dove and the cinnamon of the breasts, the white bellies snowy against the sky. The gun spoke twice. Instantly three of the outstretched necks seemed to wilt. For a brief moment the bodies hung in the air; then plunged downward with increasing speed until they hit with an inspiring *splash, splash, splash!* that threw the water high. There they floated belly up. The orange-coloured leg of one kicked slowly twice.

"Mallard!" said Mr. Kincaid with satisfaction.

Curly looked inquiringly at his master, then dropped back to his former position in the bottom of the boat. Bobby settled himself on his shell-box ——

Swish! ——he peered out startled and there among the decoys swam a dozen little ducks, their heads up, their brights eyes glancing suspiciously from one to another of their stolid wooden relations. Before Bobby could realize that they were there, they had made up their minds; and, with the same abruptness that had characterized their arrival, sprang into the air and departed. Not, however, before Mr. Kincaid had shot.

"Only one," said he. "They're a lively proposition."

"What are they?" asked Bobby.

"Teal. They often fly low just over the marsh, and drop in unexpectedly like that."

Daylight was full and broad now; and the sun was rising. With it came the first signs of wind. Ducks filled the air in all directions, some circling about other ponds; others winging their way in long flights toward distant feeding grounds. Every few moments Mr. Kincaid had a shot as some of these dropped to

the decoys. Sometimes they came down boldly in an attempt to alight; at others they merely stooped, and flew by. These offered difficult side shots at long range. Always the mallards made their wide circles of inspection; but always Mr. Kincaid waited patiently for them, ignoring absolutely other ducks that in the meantime lit among the decoys. Big flocks of teal manœuvred back and forth erratically like blackbirds, wheeling, turning, rising and darting without apparent reason but as though at the word of command. The high buzz of their wings was quite different from the whistling flight of the larger ducks. One of these bands came within range, but without attempting to alight. Into the compact formation Mr. Kincaid emptied both barrels. Instantly the air seemed to Bobby full of ducks falling. They hit the water like huge rain drops. Bobby could not begin to keep count; but Mr. Kincaid said nine. Among them was a broken-winged cripple, which at once began to swim toward the rushes on the other side the pond.

“Fetch, Curly!” commanded Mr. Kincaid.

Curly, with a whimper of delight, plunged into the icy water, and with astonishing speed

overtook and seized the wounded duck. He returned proudly carrying his prize; was handed in over the gunwale; shook himself like a lawn sprinkler; and resettled himself in the bottom of the boat. Curly was a quiet and reserved character. His specialty was lying still, and swimming after ducks. The rest of life did not interest him.

Now little by little the flight slackened. Longer intervals ensued between the visits to the decoys. The sky was occasionally quite clear of ducks, so that for a few moments Mr. Kincaid and Bobby would rise to stretch their legs. Always they kept a sharp lookout in all directions, and at the first sight of game, even so far away in the sky it looked like a flock of specks, they would drop down into concealment. This was something Bobby could do; and he was always overjoyed when he caught sight of the ducks first; and could say "mark east" — or west or whatever it was — as Mr. Kincaid taught him.

Sometimes the ducks passed far away; but again the direction of their flight brought them within hearing distance of the blind. Then Mr. Kincaid produced his duck-call, and uttered through it the most natural duck sounds.

“Quack!” it said sharply, and then after the briefest possible pause. “Quok-quok-quok-quok-quok!” in increasing rapidity. It was quite remarkable to observe how the flock, apparently with a fixed destination of its own, would hesitate, waver, finally swing down to investigate. At this, Mr. Kincaid’s call became confidential and intimate. It uttered all sorts of clucks and half-notes, telling, probably, of the manifold advantages of feed and shelter offered by this particular pond. Then came the slow circles ending with the final breathless, level-winged rush.

But presently, as the sun mounted higher and higher, even these flights ceased. Mr. Kincaid lit his pipe. Curly made trip after trip, carrying in the game.

“Fun?” enquired Mr. Kincaid succinctly.

“I should think so!” breathed Bobby with rapture.

They sat opposite each other in the sociable silence that seemed to come so easily to them. The wind had risen again, until now it had once more attained the proportions of a respectable gale. Bobby liked to watch the brisk puffs as they hit, spread in a fan-shaped ruffle of dark water and skittered away. In the miniature

wavelets possible under the lea, the decoys bobbed gravely, swinging to their anchor strings. The sun flashed from their backs, and from the little waves. All about were the tall stalks of reeds; and ahead, where the open water was, grew tufts of grasses that looked silvery-brown and somehow intimate when, as now, Bobby looked at them from their own plane of elevation. They waved and bent before the wind, and the reeds across the pond bowed and recovered; and over the low, flat landscape seemed to hover a brown, untamed spirit of wildness.

But, though the wind blew a gale, the duck-boat was so snugly hidden that hardly a breath reached its occupants. The warm rays of the sun shone full down upon them, first driving the early chill from Bobby's bones, then making him sleepy. He fell into a delicious lethargy, running over drowsily the small details of his immediate surroundings. In the course of a few hours this cosy nest which he had never seen before had become strangely familiar. He experienced a sense of personal acquaintanceship with many of the individual reeds; he recognized, as one recognizes an accustomed landscape, the angle at which certain clumps crossed one another; or the vistas allowed by

the different interstices. A marsh wren had business among the galleries. Bobby watched it hop in and out of sight, sometimes right side up, sometimes upside down. A dozen times he thought it had gone; but always it came back, flirting its absurd short tail, one bright eye fixed on the occupants of the blind. When Bobby slipped still further into the warm bright land of laziness, he abandoned even the effort of observation, and amused himself by sifting rainbows through his eye-lashes.

"Bobby!" whispered Mr. Kincaid sharply.

He came to with a start, rapping his knee against the gunwale of the boat. Mr. Kincaid held his hand up warningly, then pointed toward the decoys. Bobby looked, and saw, preening its feathers calmly, a live duck rising to the wavelets. Mr. Kincaid handed over two 22-short cartridges.

Bobby's breath caught with a gasp. His fingers trembling, he opened the breach of the Flobert and loaded; then cautiously thrusting the muzzle through an opening in the reeds, tried to aim. But his heart was thumping like a hammer, and do his best he could not hold the wavering sights in alignment. In vain he recalled all the many principles of

accurate shooting he had so laboriously acquired in his target practice. Finally in desperation he pulled the trigger. The duck, with a startled quack, sprang into the air.

"Got one!" chuckled Mr. Kincaid. "That furtherest decoy," he replied to Bobby's unspoken question. "Saw the splinters fly. Must have over-shot three feet."

Bobby, carrying with him the bitterest possible cud of failure, retired within himself and gloomed angrily at the situation from all points of view. He was completely out of conceit with himself. After he had finished his performance, he naturally took to reviewing it and recasting it in terms of success. If he'd only shot at first, before he lost his breath! If he'd only remembered to get his hand away around the grip of the rifle! If he'd only ——

As though to test these theories, the Red Gods at this moment vouchsafed him a wonderful favour. As he frowned steadily between the reeds, his attention was dragged by a moving object from its abstractions to that which he gazed on so unseeingly. He came to alertness with a snap. A duck flying not a foot above the water swung in an awkward circle and lit

with a long furrowing splash not forty feet away.

Bobby glanced toward Mr. Kincaid. The latter was gazing at the sky, his hands clasped behind his head. Cautiously Bobby reloaded with the other cartridge, and again thrust the rifle muzzle between the reeds. His entire mind was now occupied by a vengeful spirit against himself because of his first miss. Therefore he had no room for self-consciousness or nervousness. The sights aligned with precision, and held rigidly on the mark. His teeth set, Bobby pulled the trigger.

Instantly the duck fell on its side, and, beating the water frantically with its wings, began to kick around in a circle.

"I got him! I got him! Oh, he'll get away!" screeched Bobby in a breath.

At the crack of the rifle Mr. Kincaid had leaped to his feet with surprising agility.

"Well, good boy!" he exclaimed, "I should say you did get him! He won't get away; he's hit in the head."

"Is that the way they act when they're hit in the head?" asked Bobby, still doubtful.

"Yes. Fetch him, Curly."

Bobby took the duck from Curly's mouth

and held him up by the bill to drain the water, just as he had seen Mr. Kincaid do. Then he laid his prize across the bow and gloated.

It was a very beautiful duck, with an erect topknot of white edged with black running over the top of its head like the plume of a Grecian helmet. The sides of its white breast were covered with feathers of a bright cinnamon tipped with gray; its back was black and gray with fine black edgings; and its wings were dark with a white and iridescent band on each. But what interested Bobby especially was its bill. This differed entirely from the bills of all the other ducks. It was very long and very slender and had teeth!

“What kind is it?” asked Bobby looking up to encounter Mr. Kincaid’s amused gaze.

“Well — it’s called a merganser in the books,” said Mr. Kincaid.

“I’m going to have mama cook it,” announced Bobby, and returned to his blissful contemplation.

Mr. Kincaid grinned quietly to himself. He would not spoil the little boy’s pleasure by telling him that his first trophy was a fish-duck, and, beautiful as it was, utterly useless.

No more ducks came for a long time after

that. The wind continued to increase, blowing from a clear sky, without scuds. By and by Mr. Kincaid produced a package of lunch, and they ate, drinking in turn from the demijohn that Bobby had filled the night before. The sun swung up overhead, and down the westward slope. With the advance of afternoon came more, but scattered, ducks rushing down the wind at railroad speed, to wheel sometimes into the teeth of it like yachts rounding to as they caught sight of the decoys. When the sun was low and red, thousands of blackbirds began to fly by in an unbroken succession, low to the reeds, uttering their chattering and liquid calls. So numerous were they that the entire outlook seemed filled with the crossing lines of their flight, until Bobby's eyes were bewildered, and he could not tell whether he saw blackbirds near at hand or ducks farther away. Whence they had come or whither they were going he could not guess; but that they had some definite objective he could not doubt. Out from the gray distances of the east they appeared; laboured by against the gale; and disappeared into the red distances of the west.

Now the evening flight of ducks was on in

earnest, and the warm excitement of decoy-shooting again gripped hard all three occupants of the boat. Over the wide marshes spread the brief crimson of evening. The sun set and dusk came on. It was first indicated, even before a perceptible diminution of daylight, by the vivid flashes from the gun. Then the low western horizon turned to a dark band between sky and water, and the heavens immediately above took on a pale green lucence of infinite depth.

"More wind," said Mr. Kincaid, glancing at it.

Finally, although it was still possible plainly to see the incoming ducks against the sky, Mr. Kincaid laid aside his gun and picked up the punt-pole.

"Mustn't shoot much after sun-down," he told Bobby. "If we do, there won't be any here in the morning. Nothing drives the duck off the marshes quicker than evening shooting."

He pushed the duck-boat out into the open. Instantly the weight of the wind became evident. Although on the lea side of the pond, the light boat drifted forward rapidly; and Bobby had to snatch suddenly for his cap. Mr. Kincaid snubbed her at the edge of the flock of decoys.

"Pick 'em up, Bobby," said he. "You'll have to do it, while I hold the boat."

Bobby lifted the nearest decoy out of the water and, under direction, wound the anchor line around its neck and stowed it away. This was easy. Also the next and the next.

But by the time he had lifted the tenth he had discovered a number of things. That a wooden decoy is heavy to lift at arm's length over the gunwale; that it brings with it considerable water; that the anchor lines carry with them a surprisingly greater quantity of water; that the water is very cold; that said cold water causes the flesh to puff up, the hands to turn numb, and the fingers to ache. This was disagreeable; and Bobby had not been in the habit of continuing to do things after they had become disagreeable.

"My, but this is awful cold work!" said he.

Mr. Kincaid looked at him.

"You aren't going to quit, are you?" he asked.

Bobby had not thought of it with this definiteness.

When the issue was thus squarely presented to him, his reply of course, was in the negative. But the night got darker and darker; the decoys

heavier and heavier; the water colder and colder. Little by little the glory of the day was draining away. Mr. Kincaid, leaning strongly against the punt-pole, watched him for some time in silence.

“Pretty hard work?” he enquired at last.

“Yes, sir,” said Bobby miserably.

“Why is it hard?”

Bobby looked up in surprise.

“Because the water is so cold, and the decoys are hard to lift over the edge,” he answered presently.

“No; it’s not that,” said Mr. Kincaid, “It’s because you’re thinking about how many more there are to do.”

Bobby stopped work in the interest of this idea.

“If you’re going to be a hunter — or anything else” — went on Mr. Kincaid after a moment, “you’re going to have lots of cold work, and hard work and disagreeable work to do — things that you can’t finish in a minute, either, but that may last all day — or all the week. And you’ll have to do it. If you get to thinking of how long it’s going to take, you’ll find that you will have a tough time, and that probably it won’t be done very well, either.

Don't think of how much there is still to do; think of how much you have done. Then it'll surprise you how soon it will be finished."

"Yes, sir," said Bobby.

"Now pick 'em up," said Mr. Kincaid, "one at a time. Don't begin to pick up the next one before you get this one out of the water."

Bobby went at it grimly, trying to keep in mind Mr. Kincaid's advice. The task was as disagreeable, and apparently as interminable as ever, but Bobby had gained this: he had not now, even in the subconscious background of his mind, any desire to quit; and there no longer pressed upon the weight and cold of the decoy he was at the moment handling, the useless and imaginary, but real, cold and weight of all the decoys yet to be lifted.

Nevertheless he was very glad when the last had found its place on the pile amidship.

"Good boy!" said Mr. Kincaid. "Now it's all over."

It was somewhat after twilight; although objects about were still to be made out in the unearthly half-illumination that precedes starlight. Mr. Kincaid lifted his punt-pole and allowed the duck-boat to be carried down wind to the other side of the pond. Here floated

the dead ducks. They were lying all along the edges of the reeds, their white bellies plainly to be seen. After all those in sight had been picked up, Curly was allowed a short search on his own account. It made Bobby shiver to see him plunge into the icy water; but Curly did not mind. He found two more inside the reeds; then was hauled over the gunwale and settled himself happily, wet fur and all, in the bottom of the boat.

The homeward trip seemed to Bobby interminable. He was very cold; his fingers ached; the anticipations of the day had all been used. The sudden rise of waterfowl near at hand aroused in him no excitement; their presence was just now useless from the shooting standpoint.

"We might try the big slough to-morrow," said Mr. Kincaid, more as an audible thought than as a remark to Bobby.

"I don't want to go to-morrow," said Bobby.

In spite of Mr. Kincaid's advice, he could not prevent himself from anticipating the arrival at the cabin-float. A dozen little bends he mentally designated as the last before the lagoon; and each disappointment came to him as a personal affront.

But finally, when he had fallen into the indifference of misery, the two elms loomed in silhouette against the skyline.

Mr. Kincaid held the boat while Bobby stepped ashore; then made it fast, and, without bothering with the game, opened the hut and lit the candle. Bobby sat down dully. He had no further interest in life. Mr. Kincaid glanced at his disconsolate little figure humped over on the stool, and smiled grimly beneath his moustache. But he made no comment; and set about immediate construction of a fire.

Bobby relapsed into a dull lethargy which took absolutely no account of space or time. The shadows danced and flickered against the wall. He saw them, but as something outside the real centre of his consciousness. The wind howled by in gusts that shook the structure; Bobby did not care if it blew the whole thing over!

"Come, Bobby! Supper!" Mr. Kincaid broke in on his black mood.

"I don't believe I want any supper," mumbled Bobby.

Mr. Kincaid took two long steps across to him, picked him and the stool up bodily, and set him against the table.

"Now get at it," said he.

Bobby languidly tasted a piece of bread and butter.

In five minutes he was at his fifth slice, and had had four eggs and three pieces of bacon. In ten the world had brightened marvellously. In fifteen Bobby was chattering eagerly between mouthfuls, rehearsing with some excitement the different events of the day.

"To-morrow," said he, "I'm going to shoot a lot."

"Thought you weren't going to-morrow," suggested Mr. Kincaid.

Bobby smiled shamefacedly.

"That's all right, Bobby," said Mr. Kincaid kindly. "Supper makes a big difference to any of us, especially after a long day."

Curly received with gratitude the few scraps and three dog biscuits. The guns were cleaned and oiled. All the ducks were tied in bunches by their necks and hung from hooks on the north side of the hut. Bobby held the heads together while Mr. Kincaid slipped the loops over them. Both counted. Bobby made it eighty-four; while Mr. Kincaid's tally was only eighty-three.

"Enough, anyway," said the latter.

Then Bobby suddenly found himself so extraordinarily drowsy that he actually fell asleep while taking off his shoes. Mr. Kincaid put him to bed. Outside, the wind howled, the water lapped against the float. Inside, the shadows leaped and fell. But Bobby did not even dream of ducks.

XII

THE TRESPASSERS

One day as Bobby and Mr. Kincaid were walking along looking for squirrels in the high open woods, Duke, who was always required to trail at heel for fear of alarming the game, became very uneasy. He dropped back a few steps, and attempted to escape from control on either side; he tried to get ahead — with always a deprecating side-glance at his masters; he begged in his best dog fashion.

“He acts like birds,” said Mr. Kincaid.
“Hie on, Duke!”

Immediately Duke sprang away, the impulse of his suddenly released energy projecting him ten feet at a bound. But at once he slowed down. Step by step he drew ahead, his beautiful feathered tail sweeping slowly from side to side, his delicate nostrils expanding and contracting, his fine intelligent eye roving here and there. He stopped. His head dropped to the level of his back and stretched straight out ahead.

His tail stiffened. Gently he raised one hind leg just off the ground. His eye glazed with an inner concentration, and the trace of slaver moistened the edges of his black and shining lips.

Mr. Kincaid cocked his gun and stepped forward.

"He's just beyond that dead log, Bobby," he said quietly.

Bobby watched with all his eyes. One, two, three steps Mr. Kincaid advanced. Now he was abreast of Duke. The setter merely stiffened a trifle more. Bobby's heart was beating rapidly. The whole sunlit autumn world of woodland seemed waiting in a breathless suspense. The little boy found space for a fleeting resentment against a nuthatch on a tree-trunk near at hand for the calm, indifferent and noisy manner in which he went about his everyday business.

Suddenly a mighty roar shattered the stillness. Beyond Duke something swift and noisy and brown and explosive seemed to fill the air. So startling was the irruption that Bobby was powerless to gather his scattered senses sufficiently to see clearly what was happening. Mr. Kincaid's gun bellowed; a cloud of white powder smoke hung in the mottled sunshine. And down

through the trees a swift, brown, bullet-like flight crumpled and fell, whirling and twisting in a long slanting line until it hit the earth with a thump! Bobby heard Mr. Kincaid berating Duke.

"Down, you villain! Don't you try to break shot on me!"

And Duke, his hindquarters trembling with eagerness, his head turned beseechingly toward the man, crouched awaiting the signal.

Quite deliberately Mr. Kincaid reloaded.

"Fetch dead!" he then commanded.

Duke sprang away in long elastic leaps. After a moment of casting back and forth, he returned. His head was held high, for in his mouth he carried the limp brown bird. Straight to Mr. Kincaid he marched. The man stooped and laid hands on the game. At once the dog released it, not a feather ruffled by his delicate mouthing.

"Good dog, Duke," Mr. Kincaid commended him. "Old cock bird," he told Bobby.

Bobby spread out the broad brown fan of a tail; he inserted his finger under the glossy ruffs; he stroked the smooth, brown, mottled back.

"This is more fun than squirrels," said he with conviction.

Mr. Kincaid glanced at him in surprise.

"But you can't hunt these fellows," said he, "It takes a shotgun to get 'pats.' You wouldn't have much fun at this game."

"I'd rather watch you — and Duke," replied Bobby, "than to shoot squirrels. Are there many of them?"

"Not up on the ridges," said Mr. Kincaid. "This fellow's rather a straggler. But there's plenty in the swamps and popples. Want to go after them?"

"Yes," said Bobby.

After that the two used often to follow the edges of the hardwood swamps, the creek bottoms, the hillsides of popples, and — later in the season — the sumac and berry-vine tangles of the old burnings, looking for that king of game-birds, the ruffed grouse.

Bobby became accustomed to the roar as the birds leaped into the air, so that he was able to follow with intelligent interest all the moves in the game, but never did his heart fail to leap in response. In later years, when he too owned a shotgun, this sudden shock of the nerves seemed to be the required stimulant to key him instantly to his best work. A sneaker — that is to say, a bird that flushed without the customary whirr — he was quite apt to miss.

Little by little, as he followed Mr. Kincaid, he learned the habits of his game: where it was to be found according to time of day and season of year. Strangely enough this he never analyzed. He did not consciously say to himself; "It is early in the day, and cold for the time of year, *therefore* we'll find them in the brush points just off the swamps, *because* they will be working out to the hillsides for the sun after roosting in the swamps." His processes of judgment were more instinctive. By dint of repeated experience of finding birds in certain cover, that kind of cover meant birds to him. "A good place for 'pats,'" said he to himself, and confidently expected to find them. That is the way good hunters are made.

All day long thus they would tramp, forcing their way through the blackthorn thickets; clambering over and under the dead-falls and débris of the slashings; climbing the side hills with the straight, silvery shafts of the poplars; wandering down the narrow aisles of the old logging roads; plodding doggedly across the unproductive fields that lay between patches of cover; always lured on in the hope of more game farther on, picking up a bird here, a bird there. each an adventure in itself. And occas-

ionally, once in a great while, they ran against a glorious piece of luck, when the grouse rose in twos and threes, this way, that, and the other, until the air seemed full of them. Mr. Kincaid, very intent, shot and loaded as fast as he was able. Sometimes things went right, and the bag was richer by two or three birds. Again they went wrong. The first grouse to rise might be the farthest away. Mr. Kincaid would snap-shoot at it, only to be overwhelmed, after his gun was empty, by a half dozen flushing under his very feet. Or a miss at an easy first would spell humiliation all along the line. Then Bobby and Duke would be much cast down.

"Thing to do," said Mr. Kincaid, "is to shoot one bird at a time. If you get to thinking of the second before you've killed the first, you won't get either. It's a hard thing to learn. I haven't got it down pat yet."

The short autumn days went fast. Before they knew it the pale sun had touched the horizon and the world was turning cold and gray. Then came the long laden tramp back to old Bucephalus, or perhaps to town, if they had started out afoot. They were always very tired; but, as to Bobby, at least, very happy.

Generally speaking they wandered through the country at will. Shooting was not then as popular as it is now, nor the farms as close together. Sometimes, however, they came across signs warning against trespass or hunting. Then, if the cover seemed especially desirable, Mr. Kincaid used sometimes to try to obtain permission of the owner of the land. Once or twice, having overlooked the sign, they were ordered off. The farmers were good-natured, even though firm.

But some four miles to the eastward lay a deep long swamp following the windings between hills where Mr. Kincaid and Bobby had a very disagreeable experience. It was late in the afternoon, so Bobby had become tired. Duke made game on the outskirts of a dense thicket, hesitated, then led the way cautiously into the tangle.

"It's pretty thick," Mr. Kincaid advised Bobby; "you'd better sit on the stump there until I come out."

Bobby did so. A moment or so after Mr. Kincaid had disappeared, the little boy became aware of a man approaching across the stump-dotted field. He was a short, thickset man, with a broad face almost entirely covered with a

beard, a thick nose, and little, inflamed snapping eyes. He was clad in faded and dingy overalls, and carried a pitchfork.

"Who's that shooting in here?" he shouted at Bobby as soon as he was within hearing "What do you mean by hunting here? You must have passed right by the sign."

"Don't you want shooting here? No; we didn't see the sign," replied Bobby.

By this time the man had approached, and Bobby could see his bloodshot little eyes flickering with anger.

"You lying little snipe," he roared. "You must have seen the sign. You could'nt help it. I've a mind to tan your hide good."

"What's this?" asked Mr. Kincaid's quiet voice.

The man whirled about.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he snarled. "Well, what do you mean by trespassing on my farm?"

"I didn't know it was your farm, in the first place; and I didn't know shooting was prohibited in the second place."

"That's too thin. You came right by that sign at the corner. Now just make tracks off this farm about as fast as you can go."

"Certainly," agreed Mr. Kincaid, quite

unruffled. "I never shoot on a man's land when he doesn't want me to."

He turned, and at once the man became abusive, just as a dog gains courage as his enemy passes. Bobby listened, his eyes wide with dismay and shock. Never had he heard quite that sort of language. Finally Mr. Kincaid happened to glance down at his small companion. He slipped the shells from his gun and leaned it against a stump.

"About face!" he said sharply to the man. "You can't talk that way before this baby. We are going off your place as straight and as fast as we can. You shoulder your pitchfork and go back to your house."

The man started again on a string of objurgation.

"I mean what I say," said Mr. Kincaid with deadly emphasis. "About face. If you open your mouth again I shall certainly kill you."

The old man's bent shoulders had straightened, his mild blue eye flashed fire. So he must have looked to his soldiers before the storming of Molino del Rey. His hands were quite empty of a weapon, and his age was hardly a match for the other's brute strength. Nevertheless

the farmer at once turned back, after a parting, but milder, admonition.

Mr. Kincaid picked up his gun, tucked it under his arm and trudged forward. Bobby was trembling violently with excitement and anger.

"Why — why —" he gasped, as yet unable to cast his thoughts into speech.

Mr. Kincaid glanced down. A faint and amused smile flickered under his moustache.

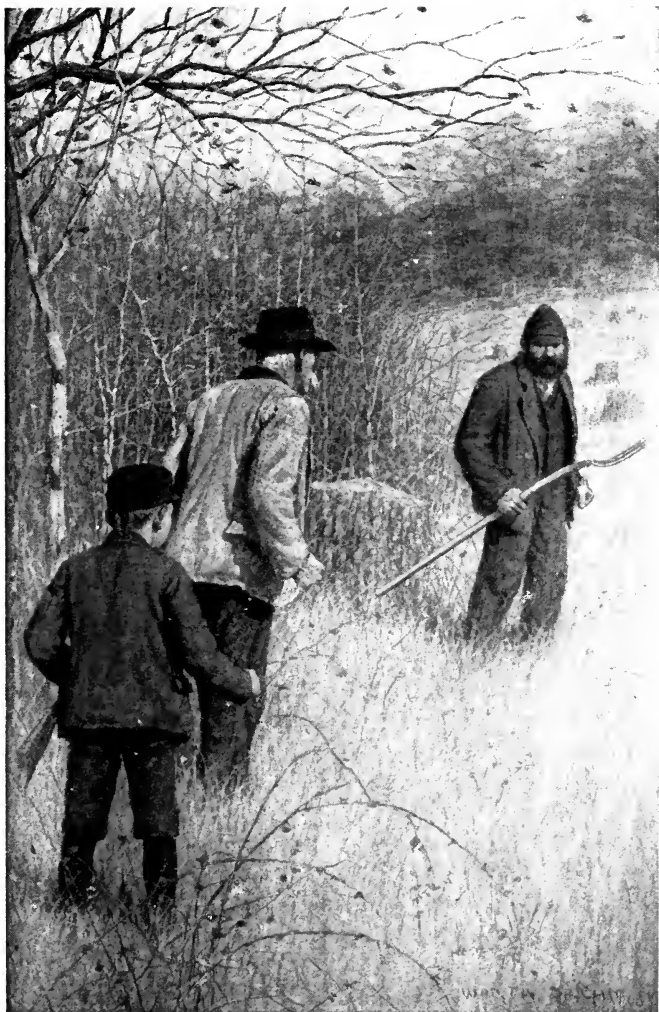
"You aren't going to do that sort of a crank the honour of keeping stirred up, are you?"

"That's Pritchard — the worst crank in Michigan. He's quarrelled with every one. I never did know where his farm was, or I should have taken pains to keep off."

They climbed into the cart and drove away toward town.

"I believe I'll make a hunter of you, Bobby," pursued Mr. Kincaid after they were going. "It's a good thing to be. Of course there's the fun of it — the 'pats,' the quail, the jacksnipe, the 'cock. But then there's the other part, too."

They had come out on the sandhills over the town. Mr. Kincaid drew up *Bucephalus* and contemplated it as it lay below them, its roofs half hidden in the mauve and lilac of



"I MEAN WHAT I SAY," SAID MR. KINCAID WITH DEADLY EMPHASIS



bared branches, its columns of smoke rising straight up in the frosty air.

“Of course, I don’t know, Bobby, whether you’ll ever be a hunter or not. It all depends on where you live and how — the chance to get out, I mean. But, sonny, you can always be a sportsman, whatever you do. A sportsman does things because he likes them, Bobby, for no other reason — not for money, nor to become famous, nor even to win — although all these things may come to him and it is quite right that he take them and enjoy them. Only he does not do the things for them, but for the pleasure of doing. And a right man does not get pleasure in doing a thing if in any way he takes an unfair advantage. That’s being a sportsman. And, after all, that’s all I can teach you if we hunt together ten years. Do you think you can remember that?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Bobby soberly.

“There’s only one other thing,” went on Mr. Kincaid, “that is really important, and it isn’t necessary if you remember the other things I’ve told you. It’s pretty easy sometimes to do a thing because you see everybody else doing it. Always remember that a true sportsman in every way is about the scarcest thing they

make — and the finest. So **n**aturally the common run of people don't live up to it. If *you* — not the thinking you, nor even the conscience you, but the way-down-deep-in-your-heart *you* that you can't fool nor trick nor lie to — if that *you* is satisfied, it's all right." He turned and grinned humorously at his small companion. "I've nothing but a little income and an old horse and two dogs and a few friends, Bobby; I've lived thirty years in that little place there; and a great many excellent people call me a good-for-nothing old loafer, but I've learned the things I'm telling you now, and I'm just conceited and stuck-up enough to think I've made a howling success of it."

"*I* don't think that," said Bobby, laying his cheek against the man's threadbare sleeve.

"Of course you don't, Bobby," said Mr. Kincaid cheerfully, "and I'll tell you why. It's because you and I speak the same language, although you're a little boy and I'm a big man."

XIII

THE PLAYMATES

Early that autumn it became expedient that Mrs. Orde and Bobby should visit Grandfather and Grandmother Orde at Redding, while Mr. Orde pushed through certain heavy cutting in the woods. Bobby took with him his two fonts of "real" type — one a parting present from Mr. Daggett — and his Flobert Rifle.

The old Orde homestead covered about three acres of ground. The city had grown up around it. The house was a three-storied stone structure, built fifty years before, steep of roof, gabled, low-ceilinged, old-fashioned and delightful. Bobby loved it and its explorations, from the cellar with its bins of vegetables and fruit and its barrels of molasses, cider and vinegar, to its attic with its black, mysterious, "behind the tank." And the three acres were a joy. Outside the picket fence were the shade trees, their trunks nearly two feet in diameter. Then

stretched the wide deep lawn, now turning dull with the approach of winter and strewn with dead leaves. It supported the fir which Bobby always called the "Christmas Tree," and under whose wide low branches he could crawl as into a dusty, cobwebby house; and the little birch tree with its silver bark; and the big round lilac bush, now bare, but in summer the fragrant haunt of birds and butterflies innumerable; and the round flower bed; and the horse-chestnut tree whose inedible brown-and-yellow nuts were just right to throw or to string into necklaces; and close by the front gate the Big Tree. Bobby firmly believed this the largest tree in the world. It was a silver maple so great about the trunk that Bobby could trot about it as around a race-track. At twelve feet it branched in two, each division bigger than any shade tree in town. The branches were held together by a logging chain. Above them were more divisions and more and yet more, ever rising higher and finer, until at last, far over the tops of the maples, of the elms, even of the hickory at the side of the house, above the highest point of the highest gable of the house itself, it feathered out in a delicate, wide lacework that seemed fairly to brush the sky. Bobby's realization

of height ceased short of the reality. Beyond that he was breathless, as one is breathless at too great speed. The big tree was full of orioles' and vireos' nests, old and recent, representing the building of many summers. Out behind was the orchard, a dozen sturdy old apple trees, now passing the meridian of their powers.

Here Bobby laboured hard with hammers and a few old boards until he had constructed a shield on which to tack his target. He leaned the affair against the thickest and tallest wood-pile, placed a saw-horse for a rest at fifteen yards from his mark and brought out his Flobert Rifle.

At the third snap of the little weapon, he looked up to discover a row of interested heads lined up along the top of the high board fence that constituted the Ordes' eastern boundary. He pretended not to see but shot again, very deliberately.

"Say," shouted a voice, "I'm coming over!"

Bobby looked up once more. One of the heads had given place to a very sturdy back and legs suspended on the Orde side of the fence. The legs wriggled frantically, the toes scratched at the boards.

"Aw, drop!" said another voice, and the

second head produced a hand and arm which proceeded calmly to rap the knuckles of the one who dangled. The latter let go. Finding himself uninjured by the three-foot fall, he looked up wrathfully at his late assailant. That youth was in the act of swinging his own legs over. The first-comer, with a gurgle of joy, seized the other by both feet and tugged with all his strength. His victim kicked frantically, tried to hang on, had to let go and came down all in a heap on top of his tormentor. Immediately they clinched and began to roll over and over. Bobby stared, vastly astonished.

Before he could collect his thoughts a third figure was dangling down the boards. This one was feminine. It displayed a good deal of long black leg, of short dull plaid skirt, a reefer jacket, two pigtails and a knit blue tam-o'-shanter. Further observation was impossible, for it dropped without hesitation and the moment it struck ground pounced on the two combatants. Bobby saw those gentlemen seized, shaken and slapped with hurricane vigour. The next he knew, three flushed visitors were descending on him with ingratiating grins.

The first, he of the pounded knuckles, was a short, sturdy, very fair-haired youth with a

wide red-lipped mouth, wide and winning blue eyes and a bit of a swagger in his walk. He was about Bobby's age. The second, he of the pulled feet, was brown-haired, slightly stooped, rather nervous-faced, but with the drollest twinkle to his brown eyes and the quaintest quirk to his sensitive lips. He was about twelve years old. The third, the girl, was tawny-haired, gray-eyed. Her face was almost the exact shape of the hearts on valentines; her nose turned up just enough to be impudent; her freckles, for she was indubitably freckled, were just wide enough apart to emphasize the inquiring, unabashed self-reliance of her eyes. Her figure was long and lank but moved with a freedom and a confidence that indicated her full control of it. She was probably just short of her 'teens.

"Gorry!" said the first boy, "is that gun yours?"

"Let's see it," said the second.

"It's a beauty, isn't it? Look at the gold mounting," said the girl.

"Look out how you handle it!" warned Bobby.

"Why, is it loaded?" asked Number One.

"It doesn't matter whether it's loaded or

not!" insisted Bobby stoutly. "It ought never to be pointed toward anybody."

"Oh, shucks!" said Number One, reaching for the rifle.

But Bobby interposed.

"You mustn't touch it unless you handle it right," said he.

"Shucks," repeated the light-haired boy, still reaching.

Bobby, his heart beating a little more rapidly than usual, thrust himself in front of the other.

"Ho!" cried the other, the joy of battle lighting up his dancing blue eyes. "Want to fight? I can lick you with one hand tied behind me."

"This is my yard," said Bobby, "and that is my gun! And besides I didn't ask you to come in here, anyway."

"Well, I can lick you, anyway," replied the other with unanswerable logic.

The girl had been watching them narrowly, her hands on her hips, her head on one side. Now she interfered.

"Johnnie, come off!" said she sharply. "No fighting! You're bigger than he is, and it is his yard and his gun, and, anyway, he isn't afraid of you."

Johnnie looked at her doubtfully, then

turned to Bobby as to a companion under tyranny.

"That's just like her," he complained. "She always spoils things! You ain't smaller than I am, anyhow. Never mind, we'll try it sometime when she ain't around. Let's see your old gun. I won't point it at anybody. Show me how she works."

Bobby, a little stiffly at first, for he could not understand fighting without animosity, showed them how it worked.

"Let me try her," urged Johnnie.

But Bobby would not until he had asked his mother, for permission to shoot had been obtained only at expense of a very solemn promise.

"Fraidy!" jeered Johnnie, "tied to his mammy's apron-strings!"

Bobby flushed deeply, but stood his ground.

"It's my gun," he pointed out again. "If you don't like my yard, you needn't come into it."

"Oh, all right, we don't want to stay in your old yard," replied Johnnie. "Come on, kids."

"Johnnie, come back here," commanded the girl sharply. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself! He's perfectly right! Suppose one of us should get shot!"

"I'll get papa to shoot with us, if he will," promised Bobby.

"Johnny, you come back here!" ordered the girl in more peremptory tones. "You come back or — or — *I'll sit on your head again!*"

Johnny came back, entirely good-natured, his attractive blue eyes glancing here and there in restless activity.

"Oh, all right," said he. "Let's play robbers and policemen."

"We've left Carrie over the fence," insisted the girl.

"Bother Carrie! Why don't she climb?"

"You come over with us," the girl suggested to Bobby. "You're Bobby Orde, of course, we know. I'm May Fowler. I live in the big square house over that way. The boy with the yellow hair is Johnny English. The other one is Morton Drake. Come on."

"Where is it?" asked Bobby.

"Just over the fence. That's where the Englishes live. Haven't you been there yet?"

"No," said Bobby.

He leaned his rifle in the barn and followed the disappearing trio. His doubt as to how the smooth board fence was to be surmounted was soon resolved. The new-comers evidently

knew all the ins and outs. In the very end of the long woodshed stood a chicken-feed bin. By scrambling to the top of this, it was just possible to squeeze between the edge of the roof and the top of the fence. Once there, one had the choice of descending to the other side or climbing to the shed roof.

The expedition at present led to the other side. Here was no necessity of dangling, for the two-by-fours running between the posts offered a graduated descent. Bobby found himself in the back yard of a tall house that occupied nearly the entire width of the lot. It was a very impressive cream-brick house. A cement walk led around it from the front. There were no stables, no clothes-lines, no pumps, nothing to indicate the kitchen end of a residence. The swift curve of a grassed terrace dropped from the house-level to that on which Bobby stood. Four large apple trees, mathematically spaced, would furnish shade in summer. That the shade was utilized was proved by the presence of a number of settees, iron chairs and a rustic table or so.

“There’s Carrie!” cried May Fowler. “Why didn’t you come on over? This is Bobby Orde who lives over there. This is Caroline English.”

"We're going to play robber and policeman," announced Johnny English, cheerfully.

"All right," said Carrie.

She sat down behind one of those rustic tables.

"She's police sergeant," confided Morton Drake to Bobby. "She's always police sergeant because she doesn't like to get her clothes dirty."

"Here come the rest! Goody!" cried the alert Johnny as four more children came racing around the corner of the house.

Robber and policemen was a game absurd in its simplicity. The policemen pursued the robbers who fled within the specified limits of the Englishes' yard. When an officer caught a malefactor, he attempted to bring his prize before the police sergeant. The robber was privileged to resist. Assistance from the other policemen and rescues by the other robbers were permitted. That was all there was to it. The beautiful result was a series of free fights.

Bobby, as a new-comer, was made a robber. So were Grace Jones, Morton and Walter. The nature of the game demanded that the oldest should be policeman, otherwise arrests might be disgracefully unavailing.

At a signal from Carrie the robbers scurried

away. At another the sleuths set out on the trail. Each policeman elected a robber as his especial prey. Bobby ran rapidly around the front of the house, dodged past the front steps and paused. Behind him he heard stealthy footsteps approaching the corner of the house. Instantly he ducked forward around the other corner and ran plump into the arms of Johnny English.

That youngster immediately grappled him.

Johnny was no bigger than Bobby, but he was practised at scuffles and his body was harder and firmer knit. Bobby tugged manfully, but almost before he knew it he was upset and hit the ground with a disconcerting whack. Of course, he continued to struggle, and the two, fiercely locked, whirled over and over through the leaves, but in a humiliatingly brief period Johnny had twisted him on his back and was sitting on his chest.

"There, I told you I could lick you!" he cried triumphantly.

"Let me up! Let me up, I tell you!" roared Bobby, kicking his legs and threshing his arms in a vain effort to budge the weight across his body.

Johnny looked at him curiously.

“Why! You ain’t *mad*, are you!” He shrieked with the joy of the discovery. “Oh, kids! Come here and see him! He’s getting mad!”

Bobby’s eyes filled with tears of rage. And then he saw quite plainly the top of a sand-hill and the village lying below and the blue of the River far distant. And he heard Mr. Kincaid’s voice.

“But, sonny, you can always be a sportsman, whatever you do,” the voice said, “and a sportsman does things because he likes them, Bobby, for no other reason — not for money, nor to become famous, nor even to win ——”

He choked back his rage and forced a grin to his lips — very much the same sort that he had once accomplished when he “jumped up and laughed” at his mother’s spanking, simply because he had been told to do that whenever he was hurt.

“I’m not mad,” he disclaimed and heaved so mighty a heave that Johnny, being unprepared by reason of shouting to the others, was tumbled off one side. Instantly Bobby jumped to his feet and scudded away.

He was captured eventually — so were the others — but only after fierce struggles. Even

did a policeman catch and hold a robber, to drag the latter to jail was no easy problem. For if he summoned the help of a brother officer that left at large an unattached robber who would create diversions and attempt rescues. At times all eight were piled in a breathless, tugging, rolling mass, while Carrie, behind her rustic table, looked on serenely lest some of the simple rules of the game be violated. In fact Carrie was just as severe in anticipation of possible infractions, as over the infractions themselves, which, perhaps, goes far to explain Carrie.

Bobby returned home at lunch time to be received with horror by Mrs. Orde.

"You're a sight!" she cried. "*Where* have you been, and *what* have you been doing? I never saw anything like you! And look at those holes in your stockings."

"I've been playing robber 'n policeman with Johnny English and Carter Irvine and all the kids," explained Bobby blissfully.

After lunch Mr. Orde kissed his son good-bye.

"Going up in the woods for a week, sonny," said he.

"Papa," asked Bobby holding tight to the man's hand, "can I have the kids shoot with my rifle?"

“Not any!” cried Mr. Orde emphatically. “Not until I get back. Then maybe we’ll have a shooting-match and invite all hands.”

He was slipping on his overcoat as he spoke.

“Which of the boys do you like best?” he asked casually.

“I don’t know,” replied Bobby after an instant’s thought. “Carter Irvine’s got an air-gun: I like him. And Johnny English is all right, too. I wish I were as strong as Johnny English,” he ended with a sigh.

Mr. Orde paused in reaching for his valise.

“Can he take you down?” he asked shrewdly.

“Yes, sir!” replied Bobby with a vivid flush.

“All right, you be a good boy, and when I get back I’ll show you a few tricks to fool Mr. Johnny,” Mr. Orde chuckled. “There’s a lot in knowing how.”

XIV

THE SHOOTING CLUB

When Bobby proposed again that his father oversee general shoots in the back yard, the latter demurred.

"Haven't any time," said he. "And you youngsters certainly can't be turned loose with two guns alone. I'll tell you: you organize your club, and have a regular time to shoot every week. I'll appoint Martin Chief Inspector; but it must be distinctly understood that there is to be no shooting unless he's here."

Martin was the "hired man" about Grandpa Orde's place.

The children fell on the idea with alacrity, and at once adjourned to Bobby's room. Carter Irvine suggested formal organization.

"Somebody's got to make targets; and somebody's got to buy cartridges and collect the money for them; and somebody's got to buy prizes — we got to have prizes — and somebody's got to keep the scores."

After much talk they elected officers to perform these duties; and formulated curious but practical by-laws. Bobby was elected secretary and treasurer; and he has to-day a copy of them written in his own boyish unformed hand. Among other things they provided that "any one pointing a gun, accidentally or otherwise, at anybody else or Duke, is fined one cent." The entire club went into a committee of the whole, marched down town in a body and pestered a number of store-keepers. Finally it purchased a silver bangle a little larger than a ten-cent piece, had it hung from a bar pin, and inscribed "First Prize." The second prize, following Mrs. Orde's practical suggestion, was a bright ribbon. Winners were privileged to wear these until defeated. The shoots were conducted with great ceremony. Each took a single chance in turn until five rounds apiece had been expended. In a loud voice the scorer announced the results, and the name of the next on the list. The shooting was done from a dead rest over the saw-horse, and at about fifteen yards. Martin sat by on the bridge-approach to the barn, smoking a very short and very black clay pipe upside down. He rarely said anything; but his twinkling eyes

never for a moment left the excited group. Martin was reliable. Occasionally he was called upon to referee some particularly close decision — as to whether a certain bullet-hole could be said to have cut the edge of the black or not — and his decisions were never questioned.

The shoots were taken very seriously. He who won the first or second prize wore it proudly. Scores, individual shots, good or bad luck, distracting influences were all discussed with the greatest interest. Grandpa Orde, happening home early one day, watched the performance with great enjoyment, his hands behind him underneath the flapping linen duster, his eyes twinkling, his jaws working slowly. At the time he made no comments; but next shoot day he was punctually on hand, carrying a small paper parcel.

“Here’s another prize,” said he.

They opened it eagerly. It contained a large round leather disk to which a safety pin had been sewn.

“That’s for the one who makes the worst score,” explained Grandpa Orde chuckling.

Thenceforth the poor shots had an interest. If they could not hope to compete with Bobby and Carter Irvine, at least they could try not

to stand at the bottom of the list. A new by-law was adopted, making compulsory the conspicuous wearing of the leather medal.

As has been hinted, the supremacy generally lay between Bobby and Carter. Johnny occasionally carried off all honours by a most brilliant score; but the week following he was likely to escape the leather medal only by the narrowest margin. The latter decoration was shared by his sister and Grace Jones. Caroline English disliked firearms; and took part in the contest only because she did not care to be left out. Both she and Grace held the weapon directly in front of them, the two hands clasped tight at the same point just behind the trigger-guard. May Fowler, Walter and Morton "furnished packing," as Morton said, between the leaders and the losers.

In this manner the children came to a thorough respect for the muzzle of a gun; and a deep pride in handling a weapon in a safe and sportsmanlike manner. By the time the snow and cold weather put a stop to the shooting, each child would have been mortified and ashamed beyond words to have been caught doing anything "like a greenhorn."

XV

THE UPPER ROOMS

On Mr. Orde's return from the woods, he was promptly called upon to redeem his promise. He therefore, showed Bobby a few of the simpler wrestler's tricks which Bobby adopted and brooded over in his manner. The first game of robber and policeman thereafter, he tried one on Johnny, but bungled it and got sat on harder than ever. Bobby's trouble in the practice of such matters arose from the fact that he was too analytical. Before an idea could become part of his make-up, he had to revolve it over in his mind, examining it from all sides, understanding the relations of its component parts, making the mechanism revolve slowly, as it were, in order to comprehend all its correlations. This analytical thought naturally made him, to a certain degree, self-conscious in his movements. It destroyed the instinctive, super-conscious accuracy valuable in all games of skill, but absolutely necessary to such things

as skating, boxing, wrestling, wing-shooting, tennis and the like. Self-consciousness in such cases means awkwardness. Bobby, in learning a new thing, was awkward. But he possessed a wonderful persistence. In time he would think all around a thing. In more time he would have practised it sufficiently to have lost sight of the carefully considered "reason why" for each move. Thus the final, though delayed, result was apt to be more consistent performance than Johnny's brilliantly instinctive achievements.

For example, Bobby tried again and again to attain the quick twisting heave necessary to the common "grape-vine." At no time did he achieve more than partial success. But in his numerous attempts he, without knowing it, taught Johnny. That quick-witted youth caught the possibilities and at his first attempt sprawled Bobby. In fact, by the time Bobby had even a fair command of the three or four falls shown him by his father, Johnny was skilful in them all and could catch Bobby with them twice as often as Bobby could catch him. This kept Bobby humble-minded, and, as it in no way discouraged him from keeping at it, was a good thing for him. Here is perhaps

as good a place as any to remark parenthetically that while the friends scuffled and wrestled constantly, Johnny never got to be much better than he became in the first three weeks, while Bobby, in later years, was the middle-weight champion of his class at college.

The autumn passed, and colder weather set in. Out of doors was available only for the activities of life. As long as energy was burnt with some lavishness, all was well, but when the first enthusiasm had ebbed, Jack Frost began to nip shrewdly. Then the children went within doors. They divided their favours almost equally between the third stories of the Orde and English homes.

The Englishes' third story had never been finished. Bare walls, bare floors, fresh varnished wood-work and the steam radiators constituted the whole equipment.

This very openness of space, however, proved an irresistible attraction to the children. Gradually articles of their amusement became installed, until the latter end of that third story was an official "play room." Shelves — made by Johnny — held books and miscellaneous junk; toys of various sorts were scattered about; against the wall was screwed a noisy chest-

weight, which nobody disturbed; near the window stood a scroll-saw worked by foot-power. Nobody bothered with that either, for the simple reason that all the saw blades were broken and the novelty had worn off. Bobby would have liked to experiment with it, but of course he did not feel like suggesting repairs.

But the Upper Rooms were full of echoes and noises when one clumped on the bare floor, and space with nothing to knock over when one scuffled, and the air was always cold enough so one could see his breath. Therefore the Upper Rooms were popular, but in a different manner and for different purposes than Bobby's warmed and furnished chamber.

Here the rougher, noisier romping took place, and here was finally brought to adjustment the smouldering rivalry between the two small boys.

XVI

THE THIRD STORY

Bobby's room was also in the third story and up among the gables. It slanted here, it slanted there, steeply or gradually according to the demands of the roof outside. There May, Johnny and Martin curled up on the western window seat; Bobby and Carter Irvine sat on the floor; Caroline drew up a straight-back chair. Then while the twilight lasted they "talked," in children's aimless fashion, about everything, anything or nothing.

By and by somebody yawned.

"My, it's getting dark. Light up, Johnny."

Then could be seen the prize attraction of the room — the deal table on which one could use ink, mucilage, scissors and other dangerous weapons. Here was screwed the toy printing press. Bobby, after a few further attempts to adopt the regulation fonts of type to its chase, had rather lost interest in it, but his new companions revived it. He showed them exactly

how to get clear and good impressions, and in the explanation proved a most comfortable glow over finding something at last in which he was distinctly and indisputably superior. All had to have cards printed. Each bought his own and set up his own type; Bobby made adjustments, and then again each was privileged to make his own impressions.

Johnny English, however, was keenly alive to the commercial aspects of the case. One day he appeared in triumph bearing an order from Mr. Ellison's wholesale house. It read quite simply: "Use Star Stove Polish," a legend well within the possibilities of the little press.

"Got an order for a thousand of 'em!" cried Johnny triumphantly. "We're to print them and distribute them. We get four dollars for it!"

Four dollars was untold wealth, though, counting the distribution, Mr. Ellison's firm stood to gain on regular rates — provided it really cared thus to advertise Star Stove Polish. To active youngsters the wandering up one street and down another, leaving cards at every house, handing cards to every passer-by, was a huge lark. When the four dollars were paid, it seemed almost like getting a Christmas

present out of season. Johnny's imagination was fired.

"There's lots of printing we might get," said he. "Look at all the envelopes my papa uses, and there's his letter-heads, and bill-heads — and lots else. But we can't do it on that thing! It takes different kinds of type."

Thereupon Bobby got out his catalogues and told them of the second-hand self-inker to be had for twenty-five dollars, Enthusiasm burned at fever heat for about three days, then the sickening realization that the total capital of *Orde & English, Job Printers* — including the four dollars — was just seven-thirty pricked that bright dream. The approach of Christmas inspired Johnny with a new idea. He and Bobby risked a half-dollar of the capital in cards embossed with holly wreaths. On these they printed "*Merry Christmas, From — to —.*" These had an encouraging sale among immediate relatives.

But in spite of these gratifying commercial ventures, Bobby's disgust grew. It might make marks on paper; it might earn money, but it would not take full-sized type, it would not print more than two lines. By these same tokens it was not a printing press, but a toy; not the real

thing, but an imitation, and Bobby was outgrowing imitations. Finally he made a definite statement of principle.

"I'm not going to use her any more," said he with decision, "I'm sick of the old thing."

"But I've just got an order for fifty cards from Mrs. Fowler!" expostulated Johnny.

"Then go on, do them," replied Bobby. "I won't."

He retired to the corner, leaving Johnny wrathful. There for the thousandth time he pored over the pages of the catalogue showing the beautiful 5x7 self-inking press.

XVII

“SLIDING DOWN HILL”

One morning Bobby awoke before daylight. It might have been the middle of the night except that, far down in the still house, he heard a muffled scrape and clank as Martin set the furnace in order for the day. Bobby knew six o'clock by these dull, distant, comfortable sounds. The air in the room was very frosty and Bobby's nose was as cold as a dog's; but underneath the warm double blanket and the eider-down quilted comforter Bobby had made himself a warm nest. In this he curled in a tight little ball. Not for worlds would he have stretched his legs down into shivery regions, and though he was not drowsy and did not care to sleep, not for worlds would he have left his lair before the radiator had warmed.

So he lay there waiting and watching where the window ought to be for the first signs of daylight. Bobby liked to amuse himself trying to define just when the window became visible.

He never could. So this morning, some time, no time, Bobby saw a dull gray rectangle where darkness had been, and knew that day had arrived. Over in the corner the radiator was singing softly with the first steam. Slowly the reluctant daylight filtered in, showing in dim outline the familiar objects in the room.

Bobby was just dozing when an unexpected sound from outside brought him wide awake. He sat up in bed the better to hear. Far in the distance, but momentarily nearing, rang a faint jingle of bells. At the same moment there began a methodical *scrape, scrape, scrape* immediately outside the house.

Without a thought of the cold air of the room, nor the warm flannel dressing gown, nor the knit bedroom socks, Bobby leaped out and pattered to the window. This was covered thick with frost crystals, but Bobby breathed on them, and rubbed them with the heel of his palm, and so acquired a sight-hole.

"Snow!" he murmured ecstatically to himself.

The outer world was very still and bathed in a cold half-light. Over everything lay a thick covering of white. The lawn, the sidewalks, the street, the roofs of houses were hidden by it;

the top of the fence was outlined with it; great mantles draped the post tops and the fans of the fir tree; every branch and twig of every tree bore its burden; Martin, wielding a very broad wooden shovel, was engaged in clearing a way to the front gate. Just as Bobby looked out, the milkman, his vehicle on runners and his team decorated with the strings of bells that had aroused the little boy, drove up, dropped his hitch-weight and with the milkman's peculiar rapid gait, trotted around to the back door. The breath of Martin and the milkman and his two horses ascended in the still air like steam. Bobby heard the loud shrieking of the snow as it was trodden, and knew that it must be very cold.

He dressed and went down stairs. Amanda, with her head tied in a duster, was putting things to rights. Bobby could find none of his snow clothes and Amanda was unable or unwilling to help him, so to his disappointment he could not join Martin. However, he opened the front door and peeked at the cold-looking thermometer.

"My," said he to Amanda, scurrying back to the new-lighted fire, "it's only four above!"

This information he proffered with an air of

pride to each member of the family as he or she appeared. Bobby took a personal satisfaction in the coldness of the weather, as though he had ordered it himself.

In the meantime he watched Martin from the window. Shortly the municipal snow-plow passed, throwing the snow to right and left, its one horse plodding patiently along the sidewalk, its driver humped over, smoking his pipe. One of Bobby's ambitions used to be to drive the municipal snow-plow when he grew up.

After breakfast, in the customary sequence of events, came lessons. They naturally seemed interminable, and indeed, lasted much longer than usual, because Bobby was unable to give his whole mind to the task. At last they were over. Under Mrs. Orde's supervision Bobby donned (a) heavy knit, woollen leggings that drew on over his shoes and pinned to his trousers above the knee; (b) fleece-lined arctic overshoes; (c) a short, thick, cloth jacket; (d) a long knit tippet that went twice around his neck, crossed on his chest, again at the small of his back, passed around his waist, and tied in front; (e) a pair of red knit mittens; (f) a tasselled knit cap that pulled down over his ears. Thus equipped, snow- and cold-proof,

he passed through the refrigerator-like storm porch, and stood on the front steps.

The sun was up and before him the facets of the snow sparkled like millions and millions of tiny diamonds. Across it the shadows of the trees lay blue. In Bobby's nostrils the crisp air nipped delightfully just short of pain.

What did Bobby do first? Waded, to be sure. He found the deepest drift, augmented somewhat by Martin's shovel, and wallowed laboriously and happily through it. Twice he was unable to extricate his foot in time to prevent a glorious tumble from which he arose covered from crown to toe with the powdery crystals. The temperature was so low that they did not melt, although just inside the tops of the arctics thin bands of snow packed tight. These Bobby occasionally removed with his forefinger.

Bobby waded happily. On either side the broad walk were tall mounds of the snow that Martin had shovelled aside. Bobby found these waist-deep. The lawn itself was only knee-deep, but it offered a beautiful smooth surface. Duke appeared about this time and frisked back and forth madly, his forefeet extended, his chest to the earth, his face illuminated with

a joyous doggy grin. He would run directly at Bobby, as though to collide with him, swerve at the last moment and go tearing away in circles, his hind-legs tucked well under him. The smooth white surface of the lawn became sadly marred. Bobby was vexed at this and uttered fierce commands to which Duke paid not the slightest attention. The little boy made patterns in which he stepped conscientiously, pretending he could not "get off the track." Of course he tried to make snowballs, but tossed from him in disgust the feather-light result.

"No packing," said he.

About this time Martin reappeared, after his own breakfast, to finish cleaning the walks. Bobby begged the fire shovel and assisted.

When lunch time came Bobby entered the storm-porch and stood patiently while he was brushed off. The entrance to the warm air inside promptly turned the crystals still adhering to the interstices of the knit garments into glittering drops of water. Bobby made tiny little puddles where he disrobed — to his delight and Amanda's disgust. The damp clothes were hung to dry behind the kitchen stove, and Bobby sat down to a tremendous lunch.

After lunch Bobby went out-doors again, but the novelty had worn off and his main thought was one of impatience for three o'clock to release his friends from school. The snow was not yet packed well enough to make the sleighing very good, but everybody in town was out. Cutters, their thills to one side so the driver could see past the horse; two-seated higher sleighs; the gorgeous plumed and luxurious conveyances of the élite — all these streamed by, packing the street every moment into a better and better surface.

And then, before Bobby had realized it could be so late, a first, faint, long-drawn and peculiar shout began far away; grew steadily in volume. Bobby ran out to the middle of the road.

This street began at the top of a low, long hill eight blocks above the Orde place and ended three blocks below. Coming toward him rapidly Bobby saw a long dark object from which the sound issued. In a moment, slowing every foot because of the level ground and the still heavy snow surface of the road-bed, it passed him. He saw a ten-foot pair of bobs laden with children seated astraddle the board. Each child held up the legs of the one behind. In front, the steersman, his feet braced against

the cross-pieces, guided by means of ropes leading to the points of the leading sled. At the rear the "pusher off" half reclined, graceful and nonchalant. With the exception of the steersman, who was too busy, each had his mouth wide open and was expiring in one long-drawn continuous vowel-sound. This vowel-sound was originally the first part of the word "out." It had long since become conventionalized, but still served its purpose as a warning.

Slower and slower crept the bobs. The passengers ceased yelling and began to move their bodies back and forth in jerks, as does the coxwain of a racing shell. Even after the bobs had come to a complete standstill, they sat a moment on the off-chance of another inch of gain. Then all at once the compact missile disintegrated. The steersman made a mark in the snow at the side to show how far they had gone. Three seized the ropes and began to drag the bobs back toward the hill. The rest fell in, trudging behind.

But already from the group at the top, confused by distance, other swift black objects at spaced intervals had detached and came hurtling down. Some of them were bob-sleds;

others hand-sleds carrying but a single passenger. Bobby stood by the gate post watching them. Each pair of bobs made its best on distance, trying for the record of the “farthest down.” Although the temptation must have been great, nobody cheated by so much as the smallest push.

Bobby owned a sled on which he used to coast. It reposed now in the barn. He wanted very much to slide down hill, but he left the sled in its resting place. Why? Because already Bobby had grown into big boy’s estate. He knew his sled would arouse derision and contempt. It had flat runners! And it curved far up in front! And it was built on a skeleton framework! What Bobby wanted, if he were to join the coasting world at all, was a long, low, solid, rakish-built affair with round “spring runners.” Even “three-quarters” would not do for his present ideas.

By now the hill was alive. A steady succession of arrow-like flights was balanced by the slow upward crawlings, on either side, of dozens returning afoot. The mark set by the first bobs had been passed and passed again. New records became a matter of inches.

At last Bobby saw bearing down on him a

magnificent bobs that had not before appeared. It was gliding evenly where others usually began to slow up. Its board was twelve feet long. Foot-rails obviated the necessity of holding legs. Its sleds were long and substantial and evidently built solely as bob-sleds and not, as most, to be detached and used for hand sleds as well. The eight occupants began to "jounce" when opposite the Orde place, and Bobby saw with admiration that this was a "spring bobs." That is to say: the board connecting the sleds was not of rigid pine, like the others, but of hickory which bent like a buck-board. When the occupants "jounced," the spring of this board naturally helped the bobs to keep going for some distance after it would ordinarily have come to a stand-still.

This scientific bobs easily excelled all previous records. Its steersman made a triumphant mark, a full half-block beyond the farthest. So lost in admiration of the vehicle had Bobby been that he had failed even to glance at its occupants. Now as they returned, dragging the bobs after them, he recognized in the steersman Carter Irvine, and in the others the rest of his intimate friends. At the same instant they recognized him and greeted him with a shout

“Come on slide!” they called.

Bobby joyously laid hand on the steer-rope and began to help up the hill.

The centre of the street was entirely given over to the coasters darting down. On either side those ascending toiled, helped occasionally by the good-natured driver of a cutter or delivery sleigh. Then the steer-ropes were passed around a runner support of the cutter and held by the steersman who perched on the front of the bobs. Thus if the bobs upset, or the horse went too fast, he could detach the bobs from the cutter by the simple expedient of letting go the rope. All the others immediately piled on to get the benefit of the ride. Some preferred to stand atop the cutter’s runners. It lent a pleasant sensation of a sort of supernatural gliding, this standing, upright and motionless, but nevertheless moving forward at a good rate of speed. Certain drivers refused, however, to allow these liberties, but scowled blackly when addressed by the usual cheerful “Give us a ride, Mister?” To catch surreptitious rides with them was considered a desirable feat. Certain daring youngsters stole up behind and crouched low against the runners. Occasionally they escaped detection, but generally tasted

the sting of the whip-lash as it curled viciously backward. Then arose from the whole hill the derisive cry of "whip behind!"

At the top Bobby found a large crowd awaiting its turn. Some he knew, others were strangers to him. All classes were represented, rich and poor, rough and gentle. To one side the girls and smallest boys were sliding decorously a hundred feet or so down the deeper snow of the gutter. They sat facing forward on high framework sleds with flat runners, one foot on either side. Whenever the sled showed indications of speed, the feet were used as brakes. The little girls were dressed very warmly in leggings, arctics, flannel petticoats and heavy dresses, and wore tied close about their heads knit or fuzzy gray hoods that framed their red cheeks bewitchingly. Bobby had always coasted in this manner, but now he looked on them with a sort of pitying contempt.

The main group stood waiting. New-comers fell in behind so that some rough semblance of rotation was maintained. The bobs' crews settled themselves with the deftness of long practice. Then bending to his task the pusher at the rear dug his toes in, while the others hunched. With a creak the runners gave way their hold

on the frozen snow; the bobs began slowly to move. As momentum and the downward curve of the hill exerted their influence, the pusher found his task easier and easier. His then the nice decision as to just how long to continue to push. To jump on too soon was a disgrace; to delay too long was a certainty of rolling over and over in the snow while your bobs went on without you. The artistic pusher came aboard gracefully, with a flying, forward leap, at the precise moment when the equilibrium of forces permitted him to alight as softly as a thistle-down. The bobs shot away in a whirl of snow-dust.

Immediately stepped forth a tall, gawky youth clad in dull brown, faded garments, without mittens, without overshoes, his hands purple, but with a long, low, narrow sled as tall as himself. His left hand clasped the front, his right hand the back. The sled slanted across his body. A dozen swift steps he ran forward flung the sled headlong with a smack against the road and followed lightly to the little deck. There he crouched, reclining on his left forearm, his left thigh doubled under him, his head thrust forward, his right leg extended. A magnificent start! So perfect was his balance

that the merest touch of his right toe to one side or the other sufficed for steering. In an instant he shot close to the bobs ahead.

"Out! out! out! out!" he cried in a sharp stacatto — very different from the general long-drawn out warning.

The bobs swerved and he darted by with lofty and oblivious superiority.

In the meantime another boy had stepped forward carrying his sled directly in front of him, a hand on either side. He, too, ran forward, but cast himself and sled with a mighty crash into the road. He disappeared lying flat on his stomach, his hands grasping each a projecting runner, his legs spread wide apart.

"Belly flop!" remarked the steersman of the next bobs, waiting. No great speed was possible by this antiquated method, so it was necessary to give the despised belly-flopper a good start.

Among those whose turns did not come soon was great rivalry in the matter of sled-runners. Flat bands were negligible and assigned to girls, quarter-rounds and half-rounds were somewhat but not much better, although several orthodox-shaped sleds were fitted with them. As between three-quarters and full-round spring runners, however, was room for argument,

and endless and partisan discussion obtained. This was a matter of opinion. A question of comparison was the relative wear and brightness of the metals. This must be caused by use only. The employment of sandpaper would be to your small boy what — well, what dynamiting trout would be to your fly-fisherman.

The twilight and the frost were already descending. Soon the lamp-lighter with his torch and his little ladder came nimbly down the street. On the down trip Bobby found his mother waiting by the gate, a heavy shawl thrown over her head and shoulders. In the darkness, and after the cold, pale moon had climbed the heavens, the hill continued thronged. About eight o'clock many of the younger grown-ups arrived. But Bobby had to go to bed, and he fell asleep with snatches of conversation, the shriek of runners and the weird ululation of warning ringing in his ears.

XVIII

CHRISTMAS

Within a week of Christmas Bobby suddenly awoke to the fact that he must go shopping. He found that in ready money he possessed just one dollar and sixty-two cents; the rest he banked at interest with his father. With this amount he would have to purchase gifts for the four of his immediate household, Celia and Mr. Kincaid, of course. Besides them he would have liked to get something for Auntie Kate, and possibly Johnnie and Carter.

Down town, whither he was allowed to trudge one morning after lessons, he found bright and gay with the holiday spirit. Every shop window had its holly and red ribbon; and most proper glittering window displays appropriate to the season. In front of the grocery stores, stacked up against the edges of the sidewalks, were rows and rows of Christmas trees, their branches tied up primly, awaiting purchasers. The sidewalks were crowded with

people, hurrying in and out of the shops, their lips smiling but their eyes preoccupied. Cutters, sleighs, delivery wagons on runners, dashed up and down the street to a continued merry jingling of bells. Slower farmers on sturdy sled runners crept back and forth. A jolly sun peeked down between the tall buildings. The air was crisp as frost-ice.

Bobby wandered down one side the street and back the other, enjoying hugely the varied scene, stopping to look with a child's sense of fascination into even the hat-store windows. He made his purchases circumspectly, and not all on the same day. Only after much hunting of five- and ten-cent departments, much investigation of relative merits, did he come to his decision. Then, his mind at rest, he retired to his own room where he did up extraordinarily clumsy packages with white string, and laid them away in the bottom of his bureau drawer.

Three days before Christmas the tree was delivered. Martin and Mr. Orde installed it in the parlour. First they brought in a wash-tub, then from its resting place since last year, they hunted out its wooden cover with the hole in the top. Through the hole the butt of the tree was thrust; and there it was solid as a

church! It was a very nice tree, and its topmost finger just brushed the ceiling.

Now Bobby had new occupation which kept him so busy that he had no more time for coasting. Grandma Orde gave him a spool of stout linen thread, a thimble, and a long needle with a big eye. Bobby, a pan of cranberries between his knees, threaded the pretty red spheres in long strings. He liked to pierce their flesh with the needle, and then to draw them down the long thread, like beads. The juice of them dyed the thread crimson, as indeed it also stained Bobby's finger and anything they happened subsequently to touch. As each long string was completed, Bobby went into the chilly parlour and reverently festooned it from branch to branch of the tree. It was astonishing what a festive air the red imparted to the sombre green. When finally the pan was emptied of cranberries, it was replenished with popcorn. Bobby unhooked the long-handled wire popper from its nail in the back entry and set to work over the open fire. It was great fun to hear the corn explode; and great fun to keep it shaking and turning until the wire cage was filled to its capacity with this indoor snow. Once Bobby neglected to fasten

the top securely, and the first miniature explosion blew it open so that the popcorn deluged into the fire. When the last little cannon — for so Bobby always imagined them — had uttered its belated voice, Bobby knocked loose the fastening and poured the white, beautiful corn into the pan. Always were some kernels which had refused to expand. “Old Maids,” Bobby called them.

This popcorn, too, was to be strung by needle and thread. It was a difficult task. The corn was apt to split, or to prove impervious to the needle. However, the strings were wonderful, like giant snowdrops shackled together to do honour to the spirit of Christmas. Bobby hung them also on the branches of the tree. His part of the celebration was finished.

Mrs. Orde believed that Christmas excitement should have a full day in which to expend itself; so Christmas eve offered nothing except a throbbing anticipation. One old custom, however, was observed as usual. After supper Mr. Orde seated himself in front of the fire.

“Get the book, Bobby,” said he.

Bobby had the book all ready. It was a very thin wide book, printed entirely on linen, in bright colours, and was somewhat cracked and ragged, as though it had seen much service.

Bobby presented this to his father and climbed on his knee. Mr. Orde opened the book and began to read that one verse of all verses replete to childhood with the very essence of this children's season:

*"'Twas the night before Christmas, and all
through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.
The stockings all hung by the chimney with
care
In the hope that St. Nicholas soon would
be there."*

As the reading progressed, Bobby thrilled more and more at the cumulation of the interest. St. Nick's cry to his steeds:

*"——— Now Dolly, now Vixen!
Now Feather! now Snowball! Now Dunder
and Blitzen!"*

brought his heart to his mouth with excitement that culminated in that final surge:

*"To the top of the house, to the top of the wall,
Now dash away! dash away! dash away, all!"*

When the reading was finished he sank back with a happy sigh.

"Now story," said he, and became once more for this evening the little child of a year back.

He listened with satisfaction to his father's unvarying Christmas story of the Good Little Boy who went to bed and slept soundly and awoke to varied gorgeousness of gifts; and the Bad Little Boy who slipped out and "hooked" a ride on Santa Claus's very sleigh, and next morning, on seeing his stocking full congratulated himself that he had been unobserved; but on opening the stocking beheld a magic ruler that followed him everywhere he went and spanked him vigorously and continuously: "Even into the conservatory?" Bobby in his believing infancy used to ask. "Even into the conservatory," his father would solemnly reply.

After the story Bobby had to go to bed.

"And look out you don't open your eyes if you hear Santa Claus in the room," warned his mother. "Because if you do, he won't leave you any presents!"

Bobby kissed them all and trudged upstairs. He was too old to believe in Santa Claus. His attitude during the rest of the year was frank

scepticism. Yet when Christmas eve came around, he found that he had retained just enough faith to be doubtful. It was manifestly impossible that such a person could exist; and yet there remained the faint chance. Nobody believes that horseshoes bring luck; and yet we all pick them up. Bobby resolved, as usual, to stay awake. Once in former years he had awakened in the dark hours. He had become conscious of a bright and unusual light in the street, and had hidden his head, fairly convinced that Santa was passing. Nobody told Bobby that the light was the lantern on a wagon making late deliveries. To-night he hung his stocking at the foot of his bed, resolved to see who filled it. The Tree was not to be unveiled until ten o'clock; and it was ridiculous to expect a small boy to wait until then without *anything*. Hence the stocking.

Bobby must have stayed awake an hour. The room gradually became cold. A dozen times his thoughts began to swell into queer ideas, and as many times he brought himself back to complete consciousness. Then quite distinctly he heard the sound of sleighbells, faint and far and continuous. Bobby's sleepy thoughts resolved about the old question. This

might be Santa. Dared he look? As his faculties cleared, his common-sense resumed sway. He turned over in bed. Then he found that the faint far sound was not of sleighbells at all, but of the first steam singing to itself from the radiator; and that the window was gray; and in the dim light he could see a dark irregular, humpy stocking depending from the foot of his bed. He had slept. It was Christmas morning.

Bobby, broad awake with the shock of the discovery, crept hastily down, untied the bulging stocking and crawled back to his warm nest. It was yet too dark to see; but he cuddled it to him, and felt of it all over, and enjoyed the warmth of his bed in contrast to that momentary emergence into the outer cold.

Shortly the light strengthened, however, and the room turned warmer. Bobby reached for his dressing gown.

From the top of the stocking projected two fat, red and white striped candy canes with curved ends. These, of course, Bobby drew out carefully and laid aside. He knew by former experiences that one was flavoured with wintergreen, the other with peppermint. They were not to be sampled "between meals." Next came something hard and very cold.

Bobby dragged forth a pair of skates. They were shining and beautiful, and when Bobby, with the knowledge of the expert, went hastily into details, he found them all heart could wish for. No effeminate straps about these! but toe-clamps to tighten with a key and a projecting heel lock to insert in a metal socket in the boot's heel. This was the *pièce de résistance* of the stocking. Bobby felt perfunctorily along the outside to assure himself that the usual two oranges and the dollar in the toe were in place; then returned to gloat over his skates. He wanted to use them that very day; but realized the heel plates must be fitted to his boots first. After a few moments he stuffed the skates back into the stocking, put on his bedroom knit slippers, and stole shivering down the steep, creaking stairs. The door to his parents' room stood slightly ajar. He pushed it open cautiously and peered in. The blinds were drawn, and the room was very dim, so Bobby could make out only the dark shape of the great four-poster bed, and could not tell whether or not his father and mother still slept. For a long time he hesitated, shifting uneasily from one foot to the other. Then he ventured, only just above a whisper.

"Merry Christmas!" said he, a little breathlessly.

But instantly he was reassured. There came a stir of bed-clothes from the four-poster.

"Merry Christmas, dear!" answered Mrs. Orde.

"Merry Christmas! Caught us, you little rascal, didn't you?" came in his father's voice.

With a gurgle of delight, Bobby, claspings his stocking, ran and leaped at one bound into the soft coverlet. There he perched happily and told of his skates.

"Suppose you open the blinds and show them," suggested Mr. Orde.

Bobby did so. Mr. Orde examined the skates with the eye of a connoisseur.

"Seems to me Santa Claus has been pretty good to you," said he finally.

"Yes, sir," said Bobby. For the time being, under the glamour of the day, he wanted to believe in Santa Claus. Doubts had cold comfort, for they were shut entirely outside the doors of his mind.

But before long it was time to get up. Bobby pattered across the room and down the hall to the head of the stairs. Outside Grandma Orde's room he paused.

"Merry Christmas, grandma!" he called.

"Merry Christmas, Bobby!" replied Grandma Orde promptly.

"Merry Christmas, grandpa!" repeated Bobby.

"Grandpa isn't here," replied Grandma.

And on his way back to his own room Bobby found Grandpa; or rather Grandpa surprised him by springing on him suddenly from behind the corner with a shout of "Merry Christmas!" Grandpa had been waiting there for ten minutes, and was as pleased as a child at having caught Bobby.

The latter dressed and went hunting for other game. Mrs. Fox was an easy victim. Amanda he stalked most elaborately, ducking below the chairs and tables, exercising the utmost strategy to approach behind her broad back. Apparently his caution succeeded to admiration. Amanda went on peeling apples, quite oblivious. And then, just as he was about to spring upon her from the rear, she remarked, in an ordinary tone of voice and without moving her head:

"Merry Christmas, ye young imp! I know you're there!"

This was a disappointment; but Bobby

bagged Martin by hiding in the storehouse; and Duke was too easy.

After breakfast came the inevitable delay during which Bobby sat and eyed the parlour doors. Mr. Orde slipped in and out of them several times. Martin, too, entered on some mysterious errand regarding the heating. Finally everything was pronounced in readiness. All the family but Bobby went into the parlour. Suddenly both doors were thrown back at once. Bobby stood face to face with the Tree.

It stood, glittering and glorious, set like a jewel in the velvet of the darkened room. Only the illumination of its own many little candles cast radiance on its decorations and the parcels hung from its branches and piled beneath, and dimly on the half-visible circle of the family sitting motionless as though part of a spectacle.

Bobby drew a deep breath and entered. What a changed tree from the one he had hung with cranberries and popcorn the day before! The cranberries and popcorn were still there; but in addition were glittering balls, and strings of silver, and coloured glass bells, and candy birds and angels with spun-glass wings, and clouds of gold and silver tinsel and cornucopias, and candy in bags of pink net, and dozens of

lighted candles, and on the very top the great silver Star of Bethlehem.

Most of the gifts were wrapped in paper and tied with green and red ribbon. Two or three, however, were too large for this treatment, and stood exposed to view. Bobby could not help seeing a sled — a real sled — painted red. He declined, however, to see another larger article quite on the other side the tree. By a perversity of will he thrust it entirely out of his head, as though it did not exist, unwilling to spoil the effect of its final realization.

For a full minute Bobby stood in the centre of the stage, his sturdy legs spread apart, his hands clasped tight behind him, his eyes blinking at the splendour. Finally he sighed.

“My, that tree’s just — just — *scrumptious!*” he breathed.

The interest that had held the circle of elders silent and motionless, like a mechanical setting for the tree, broke in a laugh. Mr. Orde arose.

“Well, let’s see what we have,” said he.

He advanced and picked up a package.

“‘For Grandma Orde from her loving daughter,’” he read the inscription. “Here you are, grandma. First blood!”

Rapidly the distribution went forward. Cries

of delight, of surprise and of thanks, the rustle of many wrapping papers filled the air. Around each member of the family these papers, tossed carelessly aside in the impatience of the moment, accumulated knee-deep. The servants, very clean and proper in their Sunday best, stood in a constrained group near the door, holding their gifts, still wrapped, awkwardly in their hands.

Bobby for a few moments was kept very busy acting as messenger. By custom his was the hand to deliver to the servants their packages. Then grown-up excitement lulled, and he had time to gloat over his own formidable pile.

The sled he at once turned over. Glory! Its runners were of the round-spring variety — the very best. They were dull blue and unpolished as yet, of course; but that fact was merely an incentive to much coasting. Another knife filled his heart with joy! for naturally the birthday knife was broken-bladed by now. A large square package proved to contain a model steam engine with a brass boiler and what looked like a lead cylinder; its furnace was a small alcohol lamp. Seven or eight books of varying interest, another pair of knit socks from Auntie Kate, a half-dozen big glass

marbles, a box of tin soldiers completed the miscellaneous list. A fat, round, soft package, when opened, disclosed a set of boxing-gloves.

"Now you and Johnny can have it out," observed Mr. Orde.

Another square package held two volumes from Mr. Kincaid. They were thick volumes with pleasant smelling red leather covers on which were stamped in gold the name and the figure of a man in very old-fashioned garments aiming a very old-fashioned fowling-piece at something outside of and higher than the book. "Frank Forrester's Sporting Scenes and Characters: The Warwick Woodlands" spelled Bobby. He lingered a moment or so over the fat red volumes.

Each of the servants contributed to Bobby's array; for they liked Bobby and his frank manly ways. Martin gave a red silk handkerchief whose borders showed a row of horses' heads looking out of mammoth horseshoes. Amanda presented him with a pink china cup-and-saucer on which were scattered bright green flowers. Mrs. Fox's offering was, characteristically, a net-work bag for carrying school books.

The Christmas tree was stripped of everything

but its decorations. Even some of the candles had burned dangerously low and had been extinguished. The servants had slipped away.

"Here, youngster," admonished Mr. Orde, "aren't you going to get all your presents? You haven't looked behind the tree yet."

And then at last Bobby permitted himself to see that of which he had been aware all the time; but which, by an effort of the will he had made temporarily as unreal to himself as St Paul's in London. Behind the tree, furnished, repainted, wonderful, to be revered, stood high and haughty the self-inking, double roller, 5 x 7 printing press!

"What do you say to that?" cried Mr. Orde.

But Bobby had nothing to say to that. He was too overwhelmed. He approached and pulled down the long lever. Immediately, as the platen closed, the two rollers rose smoothly across the form and over the round ink-plate, which at the same time made a quarter-revolution. At the nice adjustment and correlation of these forces Bobby gave a cry of admiration.

"Look in the drawers," advised his father.

The little boy pulled open one after another the shallow drawers in the stand to which the

press was fastened. Some were filled with leads and quoins and blocks. Some were regular type-cases, plished with glittering new fonts all distributed. One contained a small composing stone, a cleaning brush, a composing stick, a pair of narrow-pointed pliers, a mallet and planer. Everything was complete.

"Don't you think Auntie Kate was pretty good to a little boy I know?" asked Mrs. Orde.

"Did Auntie Kate give me all this?" asked Bobby.

"She certainly did," replied his mother.

Now the family, bearing each his presents, moved into the sitting room to give Mrs. Fox and Martin a chance to clean up the débris. Bobby arranged his things on the sofa. Suddenly there came to him the uneasy feeling of having reached the end. He had mounted above the first joy and surprise and anticipation. It was all comprehended; nothing more was to follow. Novelty had evaporated, like the volatile essence it is; and Bobby had not as yet entered the fuller enjoyment of use. He could not calm to the point of doing more than glance restlessly through the books; he had not recovered sufficiently from his morning excitement to settle down making his engine go, or

to trying his press, or to playing with any of his new toys. There descended upon him that peculiar and temporary sense of emptiness, which, being revealed by youngsters and misunderstood by elders, often brings down on its victim the unjust accusation of ingratitude.

Luckily Bobby was not long left to his own devices. A wild whoop from outside summoned him to the window; and what he saw therefrom caused him to jump as quickly as he could into his out-door garments.

By the horse-block stood a very black and very chubby pony. It wore a beautiful brass-mounted harness, atop its head perched a wonderful red and white pompon, to it was hitched a low, one-seated sleigh on the Russian pattern, with high grilled dash, and two impressive red and white horse-hair plumes. In this rig-in-miniature sat Johnny English, a broad grin on his face.

"Look what I got for Christmas!" he cried to Bobby. "Jump in and have a ride!"

Bobby jumped in, and they drove away. The pony trotted very busily with more appearance of speed than actual swiftness. The little sleigh, being low to the ground, emphasized this illusion; so that the two small boys had all

the exhilaration of tearing along at a racing gait.

"This is great!" cried Bobby. "What else did you get?"

"Yes, and there's a two-wheeled cart for summer," said Johnny; "and when you slide the seat forward a little and let down the back, it makes another seat. I'll show you when we go back."

Shortly they decided to do this. Johnny attempted to turn in his tracks, as he had seen cutters do on the Avenue. But here the snow was not packed flat, as it is on the thoroughfare, so that when the twisting was applied one runner promptly left earth, and the whole sleigh canted dangerously. A moment later, however, in response to the frantic counterbalancing of two frightened small boys and the sensible coming to a halt of the fuzzy pony, it sank back to solidity.

"Gee!" breathed Johnny, wide-eyed, "That was a close squeak!"

They turned more cautiously, and in a wide circle, and jingled away toward home. It might be mentioned that the bells were not strung as a belt to encircle the pony, but were attached below to the underside of

the thills in such a manner as to contribute chimes.

"What's his name?" asked Bobby, referring to the pony.

"He hasn't any. I got to name him."

"I knew a very nice horse once. His name was Bucephalus," remarked Bobby tentatively.

"I tell you!" cried Johnny, who had not been listening. "I'll name him Bobby, after you!"

"Oh!" cried that young man. "Will you?" He gazed at the pony with new respect.

"It'll mix things up a little, though, won't it?" reflected Johnny. "I tell you. We'll call him Bobby Junior. How's that?"

"That's fine!" agreed Bobby gravely.

In the dead cold air of the Englishes' barn, which was situated in an alley-way, the block above their house, Bobby and Johnny examined the cart, admired its glossy newness, and, under the coachman's instructions, experimented with the sliding seat. They took a peek through the folding door into the stable where stood the haughty horses. These, still chewing, slightly turned their heads and rolled their fine eyes back at the intruders, then, with a high-headed indifference, returned to their hay. After this the boys scuttled into the small, over-heated

"office" with its smell of leather and tobacco and harness soap; with its coloured prints of horses, and its shining harness behind the glass doors; with its cushioned wooden armchairs, its sawdust box and its round hot stove with the soap-stones heating atop. Here they toasted through and through; then clumped stiffly down to the Englishes' house, where Johnny exhibited his other presents. They were varied, numerous and expensive. Bobby's Christmas was as dear to him as ever; but it no longer filled the sky. Another and higher mountain had lifted itself beyond his ranges. The eagerness to exhibit triumphantly to Johnny which, up to this moment, he had with difficulty restrained, was suddenly dashed. It hardly seemed worth while.

"Come over and see my things," he suggested without much enthusiasm.

"It's dinner time now, Bobby," objected Mrs. English, who had just come in. "After dinner."

"All right; after dinner, then," agreed Bobby. "Bring Caroline," he added as an after-thought.

That demure damsel had also her array of presents, of which she seemed very proud, but which did not interest Bobby in the slightest.

They seemed to be silver-handled scissors, and pincushions, and embroidered handkerchief-holders and similar rubbish.

But when Johnny — without Caroline — appeared shortly after the elaborate Christmas dinner the production of which constituted Grandma Orde's chief delight in the day, Bobby's enthusiasm returned. Johnny went wild over the printing press. Experience with the toy press had given him a basis of comparison.

"My!" he ejaculated at last, "I believe I'd rather have this than Bobby Junior!"

"Now," continued Johnny, "we can get all sorts of orders. I'll ask papa about envelopes and letter-heads this evening."

XIX

THE BOXING MATCH

Early after breakfast next morning appeared Johnny.

"I asked Papa about envelopes. He says he won't give us an order until he sees samples of the type and the work, but he says if we can do it as well as the regular printer, he doesn't mind giving us an order for a thousand. Here's one."

The boys ascended at once to Bobby's room. Investigation of the fonts showed that the firm possessed the proper type. Bobby set up the matter in the composing stick — and promptly pried it when he attempted to move it to the chase. He had forgotten to put a lead in first, so there was nothing to bind the top line. Redistribution and rectification of the error were in order. It took a good half-hour to get the type properly arranged in the chase. When single letters did not drop through from the middle, the ends of the lines fell away, and then,

try as they would, the boys were unable to lock the stickful in the chase. Either it would not bind, or it warped out or in so that even without trial it could be seen that a clear impression was manifestly impossible. These and other mechanical difficulties occupied them until noon. Johnny was wild-eyed and nervous.

"Why, we haven't even started to print!" he cried, "We'll never get a job done at this rate! I don't believe the old press is any good, anyhow!"

"Yes, it is," insisted Bobby doggedly. "We'll get it yet."

He hardly finished his lunch, so eager was he to be back at the problem. Johnny did not come until after two o'clock, and then stood his hands in his pockets, surveying his absorbed partner with some disgust.

"Well," said he, "is the old thing working yet?"

Bobby looked up absorbedly.

"She's going to in just a second — you wait," he muttered.

A moment later he lifted the locked form in triumph. It held together and it was flat. Immediately Johnny's nearly extinct enthusiasm flamed up.

"Stick her in!" he cried. "Come on, we can show Papa a sample to-night. How many an hour do you suppose we can print on her, Bobby?"

"I don't know," replied Bobby.

They inserted the form, slipped a blank envelope in the corner and were ready for the first trial.

"It won't be even on the paper," said Bobby, "but we can fix that later."

He pulled down and back the long lever and the two heads bumped together over the result. One side of the legend was very heavy and black and clear, but the other was almost invisible.

"Oh, snakes!" cried Johnny in disappointment.

"Oh, that's all right," reasoned Bobby out of his experience with the toy press. "All it needs is paper underneath."

But paper underneath proved inadequate. It was impossible with paper to establish the nice gradation necessary to equalize the pressure. And then, also, too much paper made too deep an impression.

At the failure of this tried expedient even Bobby's patience ran short for the time being.

"Come on over to my house," suggested

Johnny crossly. "The crowd's coming. I got boxing gloves for Christmas too, but I bet they're no good either. I bet they rip first thing."

Sore at heart and in glum silence the two marched around the corner to the Englishes'.

Here already in the cold third story were Grace Jones and Martin Drake, skipping about in a game of hop-sotch to keep warm. Shortly May and Carter arrived together and Caroline ascended from her own room where she had been sewing. At sight of the boxing gloves May and Morton set up a shout.

"Nope," vetoed Johnny, "Bobby and I are going to try them first!"

The youngsters were at first a little awkward with the unusual-sized fists, but soon forgot a detail as trivial as that. Neither knew the first principles of hitting. Round-arm blows with the head lowered were first choice, of which a good ninety per cent. went wild. The other ten naturally had little force, but there was a great deal of action. In this game Bobby stood no disadvantage with Johnny. After the first few seconds, finding himself, to his surprise, still unhurt, he sailed in with some confidence. Accidently Johnny ran square against his extended fist. It jarred Johnny

considerably, and made that youth exceedingly eager to get even. Shortly he succeeded. The pair warmed up. Affairs began to get serious. In a brisk though wild rally they clinched, and in a moment were rolling over and over on the floor, pummelling vigorously.

But immediately Carter jerked them apart.

"Here, that's no way to box. Keep your feet. Here, May, give us a little help."

They pulled the contestants to their feet. Johnny and Bobby were very mussed up and dusty. Johnny's nose was bleeding slightly; Bobby's eye was a trifle swelled. The instant their captors released them, they went at it again, hammer and tongs. They were certainly not angry as enemies are angry, but as certainly for the time being, in the sense that each was grimly resolved on victory, they had ceased to be friends.

How long the combat might have lasted it would be impossible to say. Bobby had never before used his fists, while the aggressive Johnny, at public school, was the hero of many fights. But as long as Carter insisted on no rough-and-tumble this fact gave the elder boy little advantage. The damage that two light-weights can inflict on each other with round-arm blows is

inconsiderable, and Bobby was of the sort that punishment merely renders obstinate. Probably sheer lack of breath would in time have called the battle a draw, but all at once Bobby had an idea. So illuminating and sudden was it that for an instant he forgot what he was doing. Johnny closed on him like a tiger beating him with both fists as hard as he could hit. Even then Bobby's thought was not of defence but of explanation.

"Hold on! hold on! quit!" he kept on crying in expostulation. "Wait a minute! I got it!"

It is doubtful if Johnny heard him. Before Carter and May could stop him he had inflicted more damage than the rest of the fight had produced. Bobby's nose too was bleeding, and a huge red bump was swelling on his forehead when finally he was freed.

However, he was not even aware of those trifles.

"Don't you know those two screws —" he began eagerly to Johnny.

But that young gentleman, panting, was not yet emerged from the red haze of combat.

"I licked!" he cried. "Didn't I lick? He quit! He hollered 'nuff, didn't he? I licked the stuffing out of him!"

“O shut up!” said May contemptuously; “or I’ll lick the stuffing out of you.”

Bobby, practically oblivious to the meaning of this exchange, had stripped off his gloves and had advanced, eager to finish his explanation.

“Johnny, I just thought!” said he. “You remember those two thumb screws under the platen? I bet you if you turn those, they’ll regulate the pressure. Let’s go over and try it!”

Johnny looked at Bobby uncertainly. He drew a deep breath, then his round, cheerful grin broke over his face.”

“I guess I didn’t lick you after all, old socks,” said he. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. Go on try your old press. I’m sick of her.”

Bobby washed his bruised face and went home. Sure enough, the thumb screws did regulate the pressure. Within a half-hour he was back at the Englishes’. The boxing gloves were still in commission. Morton was dancing around and around May, slapping her with his open glove first on one side the face, then on the other. The girl, in spite of her strength, agility and superior age was as awkward as are most girls at hitting with their fists. She made short angry

rushes at the dodging Morton who slipped easily in and out of her guard. He was getting even for a long tyranny. Finally May stopped short and stamped her foot with vexation. Her face was very red and she actually had tears in her eyes.

"Oh!" she cried. "You wait 'till I get hold of you, you miserable little thing!"

At that the boxing ended. Bobby drew Johnny one side. "Look there!" said he with pardonable pride. "Show that to your papa. I bet he can't tell it from the regular printers. Look out; it's wet yet."

Johnny gazed with awe on the perfect production. The next instant all his dead enthusiasm leaped to life.

"I bet we can print the whole thousand in one morning!" he cried gleefully, "And then there's the letter-heads, and bill-heads and May's cards — and perhaps your father and Carter's will give us jobs — and ——"

They clattered down the stairs to the tune of Johnny's business expansions.

XX

THE PARTNERS

The thousand envelopes were printed and delivered. Mr. English expressed himself as entirely satisfied, and allowed the new firm to experiment on bill heads. Mr. Orde promised an order of more envelopes when these were finished.

Johnny's commercial instincts were thoroughly aroused. He saw visions of wealth beyond the dreams of wood-box-filling or street-sprinkling with the garden hose in summer. In that community even Johnny English had to earn his own pocket money. Bobby, too, entered into the game with enthusiasm — for over a week. Then he grew tired of the mechanical repetition of that which he had acquired so painfully. It no longer interested him to set the type, to lock the form, to ink and clean the ink plates. He had carried these things to their last refinement of skill. As for the actual printing — the endless inseting of paper, pulling

down on the lever, removing the paper — this he could no longer stand for more than half an hour at a time. Then a deep lethargy seized his every faculty. His mind sank to stupor. Time no longer possessed dimensions, but blew into a vast Present which was never going to cease. If he kept at it a half-hour after this condition manifested itself he emerged from the ordeal as tired and sleepy as though he had undergone hard physical labour. It was more than mere boredom; it was a revolt of the soul.

At first his loyalty to the firm and his sense of duty drove him on. Then gradually he relinquished the printing to Johnny. That young man could cheerfully have stuck to the press twelve hours a day, if he had been permitted. Each printed bit of paper laid aside on the growing pile to his left represented just that much more pocket money.

So, strangely enough, the relative position of the two boys toward the work in hand was reversed. At first, when the mechanical difficulties seemed insurmountable, Bobby's perseverance had been inexhaustible, while Johnny was a dozen times inclined to let the whole problem go smash. Now, when the task of feeding into the press the thousand necessary

to fill orders seemed endless, Johnny's patience rose more than adequate to the occasion, while Bobby's spirit shrank at the mere size of it.

Finally matters adjusted themselves so that Bobby saw to the alignment, the perfection of the impression, all the rest of getting ready; then Johnny took hold.

But one day Bobby, walking glumly over to the composing stone, suggested something new.

"Let's start a newspaper," said he.

The clang of the press came to an abrupt stop.

"Let's start a newspaper," he repeated.

"We're got enough pica to print one page at a time."

Rashly Johnny agreed. All went well until it came time to print the sheet. Eighteen subscribers were secured at five cents a copy. Johnny and Bobby wrote the entire number between them. Bobby set it up, happily. Johnny, also happily, turned out certain letter-heads at the press. Then came time to print. And at that moment trouble began.

The first copy was legible but smudgy. Bobby was not satisfied and attempted improvement, most of which, so far from improving, gave cause for fresh defects. Johnny was standing about impatiently.

"Come on," said he at last, "that's good enough. They can read it, all right, and those few letters don't matter. Let it go at that."

But Bobby shook his head and carried the form back to the composing stone.

Four days he worked over the first page of the *Weekly Eagle*. Johnny expostulated, stormed, pleaded with tears in his eyes.

"Let's let the whole thing slide," he begged. "All we get out of it anyway is less'n a dollar and think of all the time we're wasting. That job for Mr. Fowler isn't all done, and Smith's Meat Market is going to order some bill-heads."

But Bobby was obstinate. Finally Johnny, in disgust, left him to his own devices.

The world for Bobby contained but one thing. His recollections of that time are of a flaring gas jet and the smell of printer's ink. He won finally and duly delivered the eighteen copies — letter-perfect. Probably five hundred other and imperfect examples of the *Weekly Eagle* found their way into the furnace.

Johnny plucked up heart and returned, only to find that the printing press question was dead as far as Bobby was concerned.

"I'm sick of printing." was all Bobby would say, and no argument as to unexploited wealth

could move him. The subject had not only lost interest, but mere casual thought of its details brought on a faint repetition of the mental lethargy. The sight of the press and its varied appurtenances threw his mind into the defensive blank coma which rendered him incapable of the simplest intellectual effort. This was something as outside Bobby's control as the beating of his heart. He did not understand it, nor attempt to analyze it.

"I'm sick of it," said he; just as after the labour of building a fort in Monrovia, he had with the same remark deserted his companions on the threshold of its enjoyment.

Bobby thought he exercised a choice when he turned from printing, just as he chose whether to walk on the right or on the left side of the street. In reality it would have been impossible for him to re-enter his interest, his enthusiasm; impossible even for him to have accomplished the mechanical labour of the trade save at an utterly disproportionate expense of nervous energy.

Bobby did not know this; of course, Johnny was not capable of such analysis. The only human being who might have understood and worked in correction of the tendency, read the

affair amiss. Mrs. Orde was only too glad to get Bobby into the open air again, and saw in his abandonment of this feverish enthusiasm only cause for rejoicing.

So Bobby threw his friend into despair by declining to go on with a flourishing business. "Bime by," said he. "I'm sick of it, now." As a matter of fact he never touched the printing press again. His parents deplored the useless waste of a large amount of money and drew the usual conclusion that it is foolish to buy children expensive things. No doubt from that standpoint the affair was deplorable; yet there is this to be noted, that Bobby's enthusiasm blew out only after he had thought all around the subject, back front, bottom and sides. He knew that printing press theoretically and practically and all it could do. As long as it withheld the smallest secret Bobby clung to it, his soul at white heat. But the repetition and again the repetition of what he had learned thoroughly struck cold his every higher faculty. He shrugged it all from him, and turned with unabated freshness his inquiring child's eyes to what new the world had to offer him.

XXI

WINTER

After the collapse of the printing business Bobby and Johnny turned to Bobby Junior and the little sleigh. They drove often, far into the country. It was the dead of winter. The country was wide and still and white. Against the prevailing note of the snow the patches of woods showed almost black. The landscape looked strangely flattened out, and bereft of life. Nevertheless that impression was false, for the little sleigh climbed and dipped over many hills and hollows; and the boys were continually seeing living things and their indications. Tracks of small animals embroidered the snow. Strange tame birds hopped here and there or rose and swept down wind with plaintive pipings that, in spite of their lack of fear, lent them a spirit of wildness akin to the aloof savaging of winter winds in bared trees. Bobby and Johnny recognized the snow buntings, tossing in compact big companies like

flakes in a whirlwind, the unsoiled white effect of their plumage shaming the snow. Besides these were little red-polls, dressed warmly in magenta and brown for the winter, hopping and clinging among the seed-weeds exposed by the breezes; and hardy, impudent, harsh-voiced blue-jays, cloaking much villany and cunning under wondrous suits of clothes; and trim, neat cedar wax-wings, perching on elevated twigs, always apparently at leisure; in the woods, whole bands of chickadees and nut-hatches, cruising it cheerfully, calling to each other in their varied notes, tiny atoms defying all the cold and famine Old Winter could bring. Once they were vastly excited to catch sight of a hoary, wide-winged monster sweeping like a ghost close to the snow. They surmised it might be a Great Snow Owl, like the stuffed one in the English library, but they never knew. And again, in some trees alongside the road, they came upon a large flock of stocky-built birds, a little smaller than robins, so tame that the boys drove beneath them and could see their thick bills, and the marvellous clarity of the sunset yellow of their heads, shading to twilight down their backs, to black night on their wings barred by a strip of clear white moonlight.

They agreed that these were most unusual-looking creatures. How unusual any naturalist would have been glad to tell them; for these were that great and prized rarity, the Evening Grosbeak. So, too, in the pine woods they were showered by bits of cones, and looked aloft to make out a distant little bird busily engaged in tearing the cones to pieces. They laughed at his industry, but would have been immensely interested could they have examined at close hand the Crossbill's beak and its singular adaption to just this task. And of course they remarked the stately deliberate-looking prints of the grouse; and the herded tramping of the quail. The winter was populous enough, in spite of its rigour. Some of its many creatures the boys knew; many more they did not; but you may be sure they saw all that did not exercise the closest circumspection.

For miles about, the little sleigh explored the country: main-road, worn smooth by countless farmer-sleighs; by-roads, through which the pony had to wallow belly-deep, making a new track. Not the mere pleasure of driving lured them out—that amounted to little after the week of novelty—but something of the spirit

of exploration was in it. Duke always accompanied them, plunging powerfully through the deepest drifts, exulting in the snow, rolling in it, frisking in it in all directions, racing down the road and back, glad to be alive and warm this freezing weather. One day in a patch of woods he came to an abrupt halt. The boys, watching, saw his eye fixed, his upper lip snarl back the least in the world, his tail stiffen except at its quivering tip, his whole body lengthen and half-crouch and turn rigid. And as the sleigh wallowed near him, suddenly, with an immense scattering of snow and a startling roar, an old cock-partridge burst from beneath the surface of the snow and hurtled away through the frozen trees.

Some days when the wind blew keen and sharp as knives across the broad reaches, it was almost impossible for the boys to keep warm. The heated soap-stone wrapped up at their feet, the warm buffalo robes under and over them, their thick overcoats and fur caps alike proved inadequate. Then one took his turn at driving, while the other crouched entirely covered beneath the robes. The wind drove the hard, sparse flakes from the low leaden

sky like so many needles against the driver's face, filling his eyes with tears, causing his skin to glow and smart. Even in this was a certain joy and adventure. But again the sun would shine, the bells jingle louder in the clarified air. Probably, however, the boys liked best of all the warm, still snowstorms, when all the world was muffled in the shoes of silence; when nature held her finger on hushed lips; when deliberately, without haste the great white flakes zigzagged down from the soft gray above, obscuring and softening the landscape, rendering dear and mysterious the commonest things. Then sounds came, subdued as in a sanctuary, and people approaching showed portentous as through a mist, and the boys, looking upward, caught big wet flakes on their lashes as they tried in vain to determine the point at which the snowflakes became visible. There existed no such point. The snowflakes did not approach as other things approach, beginning small with distance, and becoming larger as they neared. They flashed into sight full-grown. It was as though they had fallen wrapped in invisibility until the great Magician had uttered the word. That was Bobby's secret thought, which he told nobody. Often

he imagined he could hear the word repeated all about him, *presto! presto! presto! presto!* like the distant hushed falling of waters. And as the charm was said, he, looking skyward, could see the big soft flakes flash into view out of nothing.

XXII

THE MURDER

So successful did the friendship between the two boys turn out to be that next autumn Johnny English was invited to visit the Ordes at Monrovia. He accepted very promptly, and, as the distance was short, brought with him the cart and pony. The country around Monrovia was very interesting to them. Riverland, marshland, swampland, shore and meadow, all offered themselves in the most diversified forms. The sandy roads wound over the hills, down the ravines, along the corduroys and float-bridges. Life was varied. The boys, armed with their Flobert rifle, wandered far afield.

They did not get very much, it is true, but they popped away steadily, and did a grand amount of sneaking and looking. And they managed first and last to see a great deal. In the snipe marshes they knew when the first flight dropped in — and murdered a killdeer as he stood. Out in the sloughs they marked

the earliest red-heads from the north — and accomplished two mud-hens, a ruddy duck, and a dozen blackbirds. In the uplands they knew almost to a feather how many partridge each thicket had bred; to a covey where the quail used; and once in a great while, by strategy on their own side and foolishness on the part of the quarry, they caught one sitting and brought it down. What is quite as much to the point, they felt the season as it changed. The gradual transformation from the green of summer to the brown and lilac of late autumn, the low swinging of the sun, the mellowing of the days, the broad-hung curtain of sweet smoke-breeze, the hushing of the vital forces of the world in anticipation of winter — all these passed near them and, passing, touched their eyes. They were too busy to notice such things consciously, however. The influence sank deep and became part of the permanent background against which their lives were to be thrown.

At first some doubt was expressed as to the wisdom of that Flobert rifle. To turn two small boys loose with a deadly weapon seemed to Mrs. Orde a rather strong temptation of Providence. Mr. Kincaid spoke for them. In

the end it was decided, though with many misgivings and more admonitions.

"Keep the muzzle pointed up; never get excited; never shoot at anything unless you *know* what it is," was Mr. Kincaid's summing up.

These three precepts were so constantly impressed that to the boys their practice ended by becoming second nature.

"It's not only dangerous to do these things," said Mr. Kincaid, "but it's a sure sign of a green-horn. A man ought to be deadly ashamed to confess himself such an all-round dub."

Toward the end of the fall, and nearing Thanksgiving, the boys drove Bobby Junior out the old east road. After a time they turned off into a by-way deep with sand. It ended. They hitched the placid Bobby Junior to the top rail of a "snake-fence" climbed it, and headed toward a scrub-oak and popple thicket thrown like a blanket over the long slope of a hill. They walked cautiously, for by experience they had learned that at the very edge, and in the lea of an old burned log, it was possible a fine big cock-partridge might be sunning himself. The popples, shining silvery, were almost bare of leaves, but the scrub oaks clung

tenaciously to a crackling umber-brown foliage. It was now near the close of the afternoon. The game bag was empty. Both boys trod on eggs, scrutinizing every inch of the ground before them.

"It's too late for 'em, whispered Bobby in discouragement. "There's not enough sun. They've gone in to feed."

But Johnnie seized his arm.

"There," he breathed, "See him! He's sitting in that little scrub oak — just to the left of the stub."

Bobby peered along his friend's arm. After a moment he made out a mottled spot of brown.

"I see him," said he, cocking his rifle. "It's his breast. I wish I could get at his head."

"He'll be gone in a minute!" warned Johnny.

It was Bobby's turn to shoot. He raised his weapon, aimed carefully, and pressed the trigger.

Immediately the thicket broke into a tremendous commotion. A scurrying of leaves, a brief exclamation of pain, a brown cap whirling through the air — and both boys turned and ran, ran as hard as they could up the hill until sheer lack of breath brought them to the ground. They stared at each other with frightened eyes from faces chalky white.

"We've killed somebody!" gasped Johnny.

They clung to each other trembling with the horror of it, utterly unable to gather their faculties. This was just what so often both had been cautioned against — the shooting without seeing clearly the object of aim. To the shock of a catastrophe they had to add the sinking remorse over warnings disobeyed.

"What are we going to do?" chattered Johnny at last.

"We got to go down and see ——"

"I daresn't" confessed Johnny miserably.

"Do you suppose he's dead?"

"They'll probably put us in jail."

"Come on," said Bobby at last.

They arose, very giddy and uncertain on their feet. For the first time they forced themselves to look at the copse lying below them.

"Oh!" breathed Johnny, "Look!"

Below them on the farther edge of the copse, and over a quarter of a mile away, they saw Mr. Kincaid. He was bareheaded. Curly was with him. The man was trying to send the water spaniel into the copse. Curly pretended that he wanted to play, and did not in the least understand what it was all about. He capered joyously around Mr. Kincaid's outstretched

arm; he pressed his chest to the earth and uttered short barks; he chased madly around in circles, but he did not enter the copse, which was plainly his master's desire. Finally Mr. Kincaid gave it up and departed over the brow of the next hill.

And while this little by-play was going on two small boys above him felt the warmth of life flowing back into their frozen souls. The blood returned to their lips, their thumping hearts calmed, all the blessed joy and sunshine and freedom of the world flooded in a return tide of blessed relief.

"Gee," said Johnny, "I'm never going hunting again! Never any more! Never!"

"You bet I'm going to be careful after this," said Bobby. "My, but I'm glad!"

"I wonder why he didn't pick up his cap?" wondered Johnny.

"Perhaps he had it in his hand."

The boys drove home ringing the changes on a thousand new resolutions of caution.

"It's a good lesson to us," said Bobby by way of reminiscent philosophy often heard before.

They put Bobby Junior into the barn, cleaned the Flobert, changed their hunting clothes, and

answered with alacrity the summons to the dining room. After they were well started with the meal, Mr. Orde came in and sat down. He nodded abstractedly, and had little to say. The boys were too far down in remorse to care to bring up any of the subjects near their hearts. Finally Mrs. Orde remarked this general depression.

"I must say you're a cheerful lot of men folks," said she. "What is it? Business?" She smiled at the boys in raillery at the idea. But she could not cheer them up. As soon as the meal was over Mr. Orde dismissed the boys.

"Run along now," said he briefly; "I want to talk."

They climbed the stairs to Bobby's room, and sat down glumly on the floor. Reaction was strong, and they had both fallen into aimless doldrums of spirit. Suddenly Bobby sat up straight at attention.

The Orde house was provided with old-fashioned hot-air registers. When the registers happened all to be open, they constituted most excellent speaking-tubes. Thus, without intention of deliberate eavesdropping, Bobby and his friend became aware of the following conversation.

"What's the matter, Jack? Anything wrong at the office or on the River?"

Mr. Orde sighed deeply.

"Oh, no. Everything's snug as a bug in a rug, sweetheart," said he. "But I'm bothered a lot. A dreadful thing happened to-day. You know that popple thicket out at Pritchard's place?"

Both boys froze into horrified attention.

"Yes."

"Well, just before dusk Pritchard was found dead near the east end of it."

"Why, how did that happen?" cried Mrs. Orde.

The boys stole a look at each other.

"He had been murdered."

"Murdered!" cried Mrs. Orde sharply.

"Oh!" moaned Bobby in a smothered voice.

"Yes. He was found with a knife wound in his throat."

"How terrible!" said Mrs. Orde.

"But that isn't what worries me. Pritchard is no irreparable loss."

"Jack!" cried Mrs. Orde.

"He isn't," insisted Orde stoutly. "But Kincaid was seen by several competent witnesses coming out from that thicket, and as far as anybody has been able to find out he is the only

human being who was out there to-day. They have him under arrest."

"I never heard of anything so ridiculous!" cried Mrs. Orde indignantly.

"There has been bad blood between them," said Orde; "and everybody knows it. That's the trouble. Pritchard, as usual, has off and on done an awful lot of talking."

"You don't for a moment believe ——"

"Certainly not. Arthur Kincaid never would harm a fly in anger. And I rely absolutely on his word."

"You've seen him?"

"Of course. He acknowledges he was out at Pritchard's, but denies all knowledge of the affair. That's the trouble. He offers no explanation of the facts, and the facts are — queer."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, this; the men who saw Kincaid coming out of the thicket say he was bareheaded. When Pritchard's body was found, Kincaid's cap was discovered about fifty feet distant."

"What does he say to that?"

"His story is so ridiculous that I wouldn't blame anybody who did not know Kincaid for not believing it. He says he was playing with his dog Curly, when Curly grabbed the cap

and made off with it. The dog came back without the cap, and Kincaid could not find it. That's all he says, except that he was not in the thicket at all, and certainly not within a quarter-mile of the scene of the murder."

"That might be so."

"Of course it's so, if Arthur Kincaid says it is," insisted Orde, "but what do you think of this? The cap had a 22-calibre bullet hole through the crown; and Pritchard was armed with a 22-calibre rifle."

"What does Mr. Kincaid say to it?"

"That's just the trouble," cried Orde in despairing tones. "If he'd plead self-defence any jury in Michigan would acquit him without leaving the box. But when we asked him how that bullet hole got in that cap, he simply says that he doesn't know; it wasn't there when he lost the cap! Could anything be more absurd!"

Bobby reached out and softly closed the register.

He turned to grip Johnny fiercely by the arm. His eyes blazed.

"Mr. Kincaid is my friend," he hissed. "Understand that? He's my best friend. If you ever say anything about this afternoon ——"

"Let go!" cried Johnny struggling. "You hurt! You needn't get mad about it. He's my friend, too. I ain't going to say anything." Bobby released his arm. "He must have done it, though," concluded Johnny.

"Of course he did it. I'd have done it. Pritchard was an old beast. You ought to have been along with me when he ordered us off his land."

"Mr. Kincaid says he was never up at that end."

"There's his cap, with the hole I shot in it," Bobby pointed out. "It was right where Pritchard was when I shot at it."

Johnny nodded.

"If we let that get out, they'll have us in as witnesses."

"We mustn't," said Johnny.

Following this policy the boys for the next month carried about an air of secrecy and an irresponsibility of action very irritating to everybody. They forgot errands, they did absent-minded, destructive things, they were much given to long consultations behind the wood-shed. When they were permitted to visit Mr. Kincaid at the jail, they tried mysteriously to convey assurance of absolute secrecy, but

succeeded only in appearing stupid, frivolous and unsympathetic. Nevertheless their concern was very real. Bobby in especial brooded over the affair to the exclusion of all other interests. The Flobert rifle was laid away, the printing press gathered dust. Over and over he visualized the scene, until he could shut his eyes and reproduce its every detail — the hillside with its scattered, half-burned old logs, the popple thicket shining white, the scrub oaks with red rustling leaves, the patch of brown that looked exactly like a partridge; and then the whirl of the cap in the air as the bullet struck, and the horrible sinking feeling before he turned to flee. A dozen small things he had not noticed consciously at the time, now stood out clear. He remembered that the supposed partridge had stood out against the sky; that the ground broke gently up just beyond the black log. "Mr. Kincaid must have been standing on a stump," he thought. He recalled now his own exact position, and figured the course of the bullet. "It must have gone in just at the tip top," he figured. "That's the only way it could have done without hurting his head. Otherwise, it would have scalped him." Over and over he turned the facts until gradually he

evolved an exact picture of what had occurred — here was the victim, here the murderer. Inquiry disclosed the spot where Pritchard's body had been found. It was up-hill from the spot Bobby had shot the cap — and about ten feet away. "He must just have done it," he said with a shudder.

"Why?" demanded Johnny to whom he confided these reasonings. "Maybe it was before."

"No," argued Bobby. "Because then when I shot the cap off, if Pritchard had been alive, we'd have heard from him."

"Maybe Mr. Kincaid killed him to keep him from chasing us," suggested Johnny.

Bobby considered this romantic suggestion but shook his head.

"No," said he, "there wasn't time for Mr. Kincaid to kill him and then walk down to the other end of the thicket. He must have run when I shot."

"Do you think they'll convict Mr. Kincaid?"

"Papa says he doesn't think so," said Bobby. "He says nobody can prove Mr. Kincaid was at the place."

"We could."

"We're going to shut up!" said Bobby sharply

XXIII

THE TRIAL

General opinion did not, however, share Mr. Orde's optimism. The circumstantial evidence was very strong. Interest in the trial was such that people came from far out in the country to attend it. Every day of the preliminaries the court-room was filled with silent spectators. The boys, eluding the vigilance of the women and utterly disregarding specific commands, found themselves unable to get beyond the outer corridor. Here they hung around for some time in the vain hope of hearing something. The heavy breathing and jostling of the crowd about them was their only reward. Finally they gave it up and wandered out into the grounds.

It was by now nearly December of a remarkably open year. Although Indian summer had long since gone, and although the low black clouds and heavy gales of late autumn had given repeated warnings, winter had somehow failed

to arrive. There was as yet no snow; and the sun, turned silver in place of the harvest gold, sometimes, as now, dispersed considerable warmth. In consequence of the mildness without and the crowd within, the windows of the court-room had been lowered at the top. The boys could almost catch the words of whoever was speaking.

"Come on, let's shin up that tree," suggested Johnny.

Immediately they acted on the inspiration. The highest limbs capable of bearing weight were still some three feet below the window-sills. Still, the boys could hear plainly what was going on, and could see into the room on an upward slant.

Evidently the legal processes had been fulfilled, and the first witness was giving his testimony.

"I was working in my field, throwing out manure, when I saw the prisoner come out of the popple thicket on Pritchard's place."

"How far were you from the thicket?"

"My field is right across the county road."

"At what point did the prisoner emerge from the thicket as respects the spot where the body was found?"

“He came out right opposite, a good quarter-mile, I should say.”

“Anything unusual in the prisoner’s appearance or actions?”

“He didn’t have no hat. I noticed that.”

After a few more questions the witness was excused. In an instant he appeared in the boys’ line of vision and sat down.

Another witness was sworn, and deposed that he had been driving along the county road, and had also seen Mr. Kincaid emerge from the thicket without a hat. This witness likewise, on being excused, crossed the room and took his seat near the window.

This point established, the prosecution called upon the man who had found the body. He stated that he was in the employ of the deceased; had gone out afoot to look up a strayed cow, had come across the body late in the afternoon. Pritchard had been killed by a knife thrust in the throat. He lay on his back. He had carried a 22-calibre rifle with which he was accustomed to shoot hawks and crows. The rifle had been discharged. In looking about for evidence witness had found a cap lying by a stump ten feet or so down hill. He identified the cap. He also took a seat where Bobby

and Johnny could see him — a short thick-set man with a swarthy complexion and very oily long black hair.

A witness was called who identified positively the cap as belonging to Mr. Kincaid.

At this point the prosecution rested. A moment later Bobby heard again the measured, calm tones of his friend, called in his own defence.

"I know nothing about it," said Mr. Kincaid after the usual preliminaries, "I was nowhere near the scene of the murder. What the first witness had to say as to personal antagonism between Pritchard and myself was quite true: he had ordered me off his land, and very offensively. We had some words at that time."

"When was that?" asked the attorney.

"Some months back. Therefore I took especial pains to keep off his land, and was at the lower edge of the thicket a good quarter-mile from the place his body was found."

"You did not enter the thicket?"

"Only a few feet, after the dog took my cap."

"How about the cap?"

"My retriever, Curly, was playing with me. I was teasing him by waving the cap before him. He managed to get hold of it and ran with it into the thicket. In a moment or so

he came back without it. I could not find it, nor could I induce him to retrieve it."

"When was this?"

"About two o'clock."

"Two witnesses have sworn they saw you come out of the thicket shortly before sundown."

"That was on my way home. I tried again to get Curly to hunt up the cap."

"How do you account for the cap's being found at the upper edge of the thicket?"

"I cannot account for it."

"Could the dog have carried it that far in the time before he returned?"

"I do not think so — I am certain not."

"How do you account for the holes?"

"They might have been the marks of Curley's teeth," said Mr. Kincaid doubtfully.

"Look at them,"

A pause ensued.

"They certainly do not look like teeth marks," acknowledged Mr. Kincaid.

At this moment the heavy bell in the engine-house tower boomed out the first strokes of noon. The boys nearly lost their holds from the surprise of it. By the time they had recovered, court had been declared adjourned, and the crowds were pouring forth from the opened double doors.

XXIV

THE TRIAL (CONTINUED)

By remarkable promptitude and the exercise of the marvellous properties ascribed impartially to the worm, the eel, and the snake, Bobby and Johnny succeeded in gaining a place in the court-room for the afternoon session. It was not a very good place. Breast-high in front of them was a rail. Behind them pressed a suffocating crowd. On the other side of the rail were many benches on which was seated another crowd. This second multitude concealed utterly whatever occupied the floor of the court-room. Only when one or another of the actors in the proceedings arose to his feet could the boys make out a head and shoulders. They could see the massive walnut desk and the judge, however; and the lower flat tables at which sat the recording officials. And on the blank white wall ticked solemnly a big round clock. The second-hand moved forward by a series of swift jerks, but watch

as he would Bobby could see no perceptible motion of the other two hands. In the monotony of some of the proceedings this bland clock fascinated him.

Likewise the living wall before him caught and held his half-suffocated interest — the slope of their shoulders, the material of their coats, the shape of their heads, the cut of their hair. One by one he passed them in review. Two seats ahead sat a thick-set man with very long, oily black hair. He turned his head. Bobby recognized the man who had found Pritchard's body. He nudged Johnny, calling attention to the fact.

The prosecuting attorney was on his feet making a speech. It was interesting enough at first, but after a time Bobby's attention wandered. The prosecuting attorney was a young man, ambitious, and ego was certainly a large proportion of *his* cosmos. Bobby listened to him while he spoke of the obvious motive for the deed; but when he began again, and in detail, to go over the evidence already adduced, Bobby ceased to listen. Only the monotonous cadences of the voice went on and on. The clock tick-tocked. People breathed. It reminded him of church.

A little stir brought him back from final drowsiness. A man in the row ahead of him wanted to get out. The disturber carried an overcoat over his left arm, and it amused Bobby vastly to see the stiff collar of that overcoat rumple the back hair of those who sat in the second row. As he watched, it caught the long oily locks of the witness for the prosecution. With a fierce exclamation the man turned, scowling at the other's whispered excuse. When he had again faced the front, he had rearranged his disturbed locks.

After this slight interruption, Bobby again relapsed into day-dreaming. He fell once more to visualizing the scene of that day. Gradually the court-room faded away. He saw the hillside, the burnt logs on the bare ground, the popples silvery in the sun, the sky blue above the hill. The patch of brown by the rustling scrub oak glimmered before his eyes. He saw again the exact angle it lay above him. For the hundredth time he looked over the sights of the rifle, fair against that spot of brown. "I must have overshot a foot," he sighed, "or it would have taken him square."

And then as he stared over the sights, his finger on the trigger, the imaginary scene faded, the

familiar court-room came out of the mists to take its place. Slowly the brown spot at which he aimed dissolved, a man's head took its place; the oily-haired witness for the prosecution happened now to occupy exactly the position relative to Bobby's attitude as had Mr. Kincaid's cap the day of the murder. And through the slightly disarranged long hair, and exactly in line with the imaginary rifle sights Bobby could just make out a dull red furrow running along the scalp. At this instant, as though uneasy at a scrutiny instinctively felt, the man reached back to smooth his locks. The scar at once disappeared.

XXV

THE HOLE IN THE CAP

For perhaps ten seconds Bobby sat absolutely motionless while a new thought was born. Then, oblivious of surroundings or of the exasperated objections of those near him, he clambered over the rail and wriggled his way to the open aisle. Several tried to seize him, but he managed in some manner to elude them all. Once in the open he darted forward toward the astonished officials. His freckled face was very red, his stubby hair tousled, his gray eyes earnest. The sheriff rose from his seat as though to stop him.

“I want to see that cap!” cried Bobby to the blur in general. He caught sight of it, ran to seize it, looked at it closely, and threw it down with a little cry of triumph. The bullet holes were not both at the top: one perforation was high up; but the other, on the left hand side, was situated low, near the edge.

Bobby knew that the man who had worn that cap must have been hit.

The judge's gavel was in the air, the sheriff on his feet, a hundred mouths open to expostulate against this interruption of a grave occasion.

"Mr. Kincaid did not do it!" cried Bobby aloud.

The clamour broke out. The sheriff seized Bobby by the arm.

"Here," he growled at him, "you little brat! What do you mean, raising a row like this?"

Bobby struggled. He had a great deal to say. All was confusion. Half the room seemed to be on its feet. Bobby saw his father making way toward him through the crowd. Only the clock and the white-haired judge beneath it seemed to have retained their customary poise. The clock tick-tocked deliberately, and its second-hand went forward in swift jerks; the judge sat quiet, motionless, his chin on his fists, his eyes looking steadily from under their bushy white brows.

"Just a moment," said the judge, finally, "Sheriff, bring that boy here."

Bobby found himself facing the great walnut desk. Behind him the room had fallen silent save for an irregular breathing sound.

"Who are you?" asked the judge.

"Bobby Orde."

"Why do you say the prisoner — Mr. Kincaid — did not commit the deed?"

Bobby started in a confused way to tell about the cap. The judge raised his hand.

"Were you present at this crime?" he asked shrewdly.

"Yes, sir," replied Bobby.

The judge lowered his voice so that only Bobby could hear.

"Do you know who murdered Mr. Pritchard?"

"Yes, sir," replied Bobby in the same tone, "I do."

"Who was it?"

"I don't know his name. He's sitting——"

"I thought so," interrupted the judge. "Mr. Sheriff," he called sharply. That official approached. "Close all doors," said the judge to him quietly, "and see that no one leaves this room. Mr. Attorney, your witness here is ready to be sworn."

Bobby went through the preliminaries without a clear understanding of them; or, indeed, a definite later recollection. He was deadly in earnest. The crowd did not exist for him. Not the faintest trace of embarrassment confused

his utterance, but he got very little forward under the prosecuting attorney's questioning—the matter was too definite in his own mind to permit of his following another's method of getting at it. Finally the judge interposed.

"It's not strictly in my province," said he, "but we are all anxious for the truth. I hope the prosecuting attorney may see the advisability of allowing the boy to tell his own story in his own way. Afterward he will, of course, have full opportunity for cross-questions."

This being agreed to, Bobby went ahead.

"Mr. Kincaid lost his cap, just as he said, and Curly carried it into the woods and dropped it. Another man came along and picked it up and put it on. Then he walked through the thicket and came up with Mr. Pritchard. He knew where Mr. Pritchard was because Mr. Pritchard had just shot his little rifle at a hawk or something. He stabbed Mr. Pritchard, and then walked down hill and climbed up on a stump to look around. He was facing down hill. He saw Mr. Kincaid and Curly way below. Just then his cap was knocked off by another bullet."

"What other bullet?" interposed the prosecution sharply.

"That was just an accident," said Bobby confusedly, "it happened to hit. It wasn't shot at him at all."

"You mean a spent ball from somewhere else? Who shot it? Where did it come from?"

"I'll 'splain that in a minute. Then he ran as fast as he could ——"

That was as far as Bobby got for the moment. A slight confusion at one of the doors interrupted him. Almost immediately it died, but before Bobby could resume, the sheriff elbowed his way forward.

"Laughton — you know, that second witness, the fellow who worked for Pritchard — tried to get out. I have him in charge."

"Hold him," said the judge. The sheriff elbowed his way back down the aisle.

"How do you know all this?" began the prosecuting attorney.

"If Mr. Kincaid wore the cap, why isn't his head hurt?" demanded Bobby.

"If the shot was fired by Pritchard, when lying on the ground," explained the attorney, "it would not have scraped."

"But it wasn't," persisted Bobby. "It was fired from down hill, and about thirty feet

away. That would hit the man, wouldn't it?" he appealed.

"Certainly."

"Well, is Mr. Kincaid hurt?"

"This, your honour," said the attorney with some impatience, "is beside the mark ——"

He was interrupted by a cry from Bobby.

"He's gone!" he wailed, pointing his hand toward the seat where Laughton had been sitting.

"Was that the man?" asked the judge.

"Yes," said Bobby, "and he's gotten away."

"Mr. Sheriff," said the judge, "examine the man for a scar or wound on the head."

The sheriff disappeared. The clock tick-tocked away five minutes, then ten. Finally the door swung open.

"Your Honour," said the sheriff clearly, across the court-room, "the man has confessed."

XXVI

THE SIXTEEN GAUGE SHOTGUN

Bobby and his friend, Johnny English, sat on the floor of Bobby's chamber reviewing the exciting events of the afternoon. In the tumult following the sheriff's announcement, Bobby was temporarily forgotten. He had slipped back into the crowd, and from that point had followed closely all that had ensued. Laughton's confession merely filled in the details of Bobby's surmises. It seems that Pritchard had had a violent quarrel with his man, ending by knocking him down and stalking off across the fields. Mad with rage, Laughton had picked himself up and followed without even pausing long enough to get a hat. He had lost track of his victim in the popple thicket, but had come across Kincaid's cap, which he had appropriated. A shot from Pritchard's little rifle apprised him of his enemy's whereabouts. The murder committed, he had mounted a stump to spy upon the country. He had seen

Kincaid and his dog, and was just about to withdraw, when the cap was knocked from his head by a bullet which at the same time broke the skin on his scalp. Thinking himself discovered, he had run. Later reconnoitring carefully, he had seen two apparently unexcited small boys climbing into a pony cart a half-mile away and had come to the conclusion that the bullet had been spent, and a chance shot. The idea of incriminating Mr. Kincaid had not come to him until later.

Mr. Kincaid had at once been released. Under cover of the congratulations, the boys made their escape.

"I don't see how you ever figured it out!" cried Johnny for the twelfth time.

"I knew it must have hit his head unless it just grazed his cap," said Bobby, "and when I saw that scar ——"

"Gee, it was great!" gloated Johnny, "just like a book! It'll be in all the papers tomorrow. You saved Mr. Kincaid's life, didn't you?"

"I suppose I did," said Bobby complacently.

At this moment the open hot-air register began to speak, carrying up the voices from the rooms below. As the subject under discussion was

the closest to the boys' hearts for the moment, they drew near to listen.

"It's Mr. Kincaid himself!" breathed Bobby.

"I've been trying to catch you all the way up the street," Mr. Kincaid was saying, "but you walk like a steam engine.

"I felt good," explained Mr. Orde. "I knew you were innocent, of course; but it looked dark."

"Yes, it looked dark," admitted Mr. Kincaid. "Where's that youngster of yours? He saved the day."

"I was just going to look for him. There're a few points I'd like to clear up. If he saw all that, why didn't he say something before?"

"Don't know. But he certainly spoke to the point when he did get going. Look here, Orde, I'm proud of that kid. I want you to let me do something; he's old enough now to have a sure enough gun, and I want you to let me give it to him. Stafford has a little shotgun — 16 guage — ever see one?"

"Nothing smaller than a 12" confessed Orde.

"Well, I told him to keep it for me. I'd like to give it to Bobby. He's learned fast, and he's paid attention to what he learned. I don't believe in guns for small boys, but Bobby is careful; he doesn't make any breaks."

Johnny reached over to clasp Bobby excitedly. "Now we can get partridges!" he squealed under his breath.

But Bobby was unexpectedly cold to this enthusiasm. He reached over to close the register. At once the voices were shut off. Then for some time he sat cross-legged staring straight in front of him. To Johnny's remarks he replied irritably until that youngster flounced himself into a corner with a book, ostentatiously indifferent.

Bobby was seeing things. As was his habit, he was visualizing a scene that had passed, recalling each little detail of what had at the time apparently passed lightly over his consciousness.

He saw again plainly the yellow sand-hills under his feet, and the village lying below, its roofs half hidden in the lilac and mauve of bared branches, its columns of smoke rising straight up in the frosty air. He saw the sturdy round-shouldered form in the old shooting coat, the lined brown lean face, the white moustache and the eyebrows, the kindly twinkling eyes squinted against the western light. He heard again Mr. Kincaid's deep slow voice:

"Sonny, you can always be a sportsman —

a sportsman does things because he likes them, Bobby, for no other reason — not for money, nor to become famous, nor even to win — and a right man does not get pleasure in doing a thing if in any way he takes an unfair advantage — if *you* — not the thinking you, nor even the conscience you, but the way-down-deep-in-your heart *you* that you can't fool nor trick nor lie to — if that *you* is satisfied, it's all right."

Bobby sighed deeply and went downstairs.

XXVII

THE SPORTSMAN

He opened the door and entered very quietly, so that neither occupant of the room saw him before he spoke.

“I heard what you said — through the register ——” he explained. “But I can’t take the shotgun.”

Both men turned and looked at him curiously, the first natural exclamations stilled on their lips by the sight of his straight, earnest little figure facing them.”

“Why not, Bobby? asked Mr. Orde at last.

“I was the one who fired that shot that hit Mr. Laughton’s head. I did it a-purpose.”

“What for?”

“I saw something brown in the brush, and I was sure it was a partridge, so I shot at it. I really didn’t know it was a partridge. It just looked brown. You told me not to do that, lots of times, but I got all excited, and forgot. So

you see I'm not careful, like you said. I ought not to have any shotgun."

"Oh, Bobby!" said Mr. Kincaid. "And that's one of the most important things of all!"

"I know, sir," said Bobby. "That's why I thought I'd tell you."

The two men examined the youngster for some time in silence. A very tender look lurked back in their eyes.

"What did you do then?" asked Mr. Orde at last.

"I saw the cap fly up in the air, and ran."

"Yes?"

"And then after a little I saw Mr. Kincaid come out down below, and I thought it was all right until I got home."

"Why did you jump up in court this afternoon?"

"I knew where I was standing, and I saw a scar on Laughton's head, and then I knew if the holes in the cap were low down, he must have been the man."

"Why didn't you tell all this before?"

"I'd never seen the cap; and I thought Mr. Kincaid had done it. I wasn't going to give him away."

Both men burst into laughter.

"And you thought I'd kill a man!" reproached Mr. Kincaid at last.

"I'd have done it — to old Pritchard," maintained Bobby stoutly.

After a time Mr. Kincaid returned to the first subject.

"There is no doubt, Bobby," said he, "that a man careless enough to shoot at anything without knowing what it is — especially in a settled country — is not fit to have a gun of any kind. There are plenty of people killed every year through just such carelessness. On that ground you are quite right in saying that you do not deserve the new shotgun."

"Yes, sir," said Bobby.

"But you will never do anything like that again. You have learned your lesson. And you told the truth. That is a great thing. It is easy to cover up a mistake; but very hard to show it when you don't have to. I was a little disappointed that you forgot about shooting at things; but I am more than proud that you remembered to be a sportsman. With your father's permission, I'm going to get you that shotgun, just the same. We'll go down together in the morning to get it."

At the end of ten minutes more, Bobby

returned to his room. He looked about it as one looks on a half-remembered spot visited long ago. The place seemed smaller; the toys trivial. A deep gulf had been passed since he had left the room a half-hour before. To his eyes had opened a new vision. Little Boyhood had fallen away from him as a garment. A touch had loosed. All experience and observation had led the way; but it was only in expectation of the supreme test of self-sacrifice. Character changes radically only under that test. Bobby had borne it well; and now stood at the threshold of his Youth.

He picked up the Flobert rifle and looked it over.

"It'll always be handy to fool with," said he to Johnny.

That youngster looked up with sardonic humour.

"Gee, you're gettin' swelled head with your new gun," said he.

THE END





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